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by *Felda Larrie*

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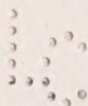


ZELDA DAVIES

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HER SACRIFICE

By
Zelda Edloe Davies



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CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE LETTER CONTAINED.

THREE young women stood on the piazza exchanging adieux that threatened to be rather prolonged, as each found a last word to say.

"Since you have come on foot, my dear Madame, I will accompany you to the end of the park. Will you come with us, aunt?" said a tall, stately girl.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the aunt in horror, "walk a good kilometer and a half in this heat, thank you! It is well enough for you, who scarcely weigh sixty kilos and are as light-footed as sixteen!"

"With several years added," laughed the girl.

"My dear Barrane," observed the elder woman, turning to her guest, "I wish you would lecture her. It would be an act of charity. She may need your advice; but I have given up in despair, for she never takes my words seriously."

"Because you are younger than I, Aunt Louise. Besides, in our youth, you formed a habit of laughing at everything. For fear of weeping at everything, perhaps."

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"What shall I lecture her on, Madame Vaudery?" asked the baroness, smiling as she shook hands for the last time with this lively, plump little woman called "Aunt Louise."

"On marriage, of course. It is nonsense for a good and pretty girl like her to shun marriage, not that one marries for pleasure. I know something of that, and she was right in remaining a young girl beyond ordinary limits. But she must at last submit to it. It is a family and a patriotic duty, and should be taught in all those books of republican morals designed for the instruction of young girls. In fact, it is what we might call the obligatory feminine service."

"Very well, I shall take her to task. Not from the patriotic standpoint, but the lecture will be none the less profitable."

The glad June sunshine bathed the old chateau, giving life and gaiety to that imposing mass of gray stone, flanked by two enormous towers pierced with long, narrow loopholes. High perched on a hillock, the chateau presented a half barbaric aspect, with its plain facade and irregular windows. But nothing can resist the magic of sunshine, and the baroness cast a last admiring glance embracing the dwelling, the somewhat neglected garden, the immense expanse of forest, and the wonderful view of the sea beyond.

"How I love your solitude, my dear Edloe!" she exclaimed.

"This is the only place where I feel perfectly happy," replied Edloe LaFaucher, with a quiet smile. "I am a hermit, and I adore this forest. The odor of the bushes and the rustling of dead leaves under my feet pursue me when I go into the world. The three months in Paris, which appear so insufficient

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to my aunt, are so many months of exile to me. She cannot understand it! She does not know that in the many hours I spend in the midst of my trees I am never alone! That the branches speak and the birds warble to me; and that the sky seen through this foliage is more beautiful and radiant than elsewhere. You see how well fitted I am for a woman's ordinary sphere; how well disposed I am to heed my aunt's advice!"

"And yet, my child——"

"Oh! I had forgotten," laughed Edloe. "You have promised to lecture me."

The Baroness D'Arcy stopped in the middle of the path they were following, and her thin, emaciated face brightened up with a smile so kind and radiant that for a moment she seemed almost beautiful, with her white hair and sparkling eyes.

"Oh! my dear Edloe," she said, "I can only say what comes from my heart to my lips—and you know that I want you for my daughter. I love you so much! Almost as much as I love my only son!"

Moved by these words of affection, the young girl kissed the baroness, but made no reply.

They resumed their walk in silence, and soon caught a glimpse of the blue sea through the trees that covered the hillock. The chateau was now hidden from view, entirely concealed in its nest of tall trees; the road turned abruptly to the right and the hillock disappeared to appear only now and then in the winding of the path.

In all that enchanting Norman country in the vicinity of ——, there is perhaps no walk comparable to this avenue of the Cote boissée. Under their feet they crushed a thick, soft carpet of moss; to the right and to the left extended the wild, luxuriant forest, brightened, here and there, by blossoms of wild roses;

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in the distance stretched the immense expanse of water, glistening under the sun and displaying every tint from pale gray to dark blue. Then, further on, could be seen the mouth of the Seine, so vast, so imposing, that Havre seemed but a thin, black line, dominated by its two lighthouses. A few white sails and the light smoke of passing steamers alone animated this immensity. The whole made an almost solemn impression of the infinite—of silence—of a horizon lost over there—far, far away, where it mingled with the sky itself.

“Let us sit here for a while, Madame,” said Edloe, quietly.

The tall trees of the forest were here replaced by pine shrubbery that emitted a delicious aromatic odor, and the absolute silence was broken only by the buzzing of insects or the rapid flight of the birds. The songs had ceased: two blackbirds alone chirruped in the distance. The baroness took the young girl’s hand into hers; Edloe raised her eyes and she saw the tears glistening in them.

“I had no wish to pain you, my child,” she said, softly.

“Oh! my dear Madam, you did not pain me! Only, in this very spot, I saw my mother weep, eighteen years ago to-day. I was very small and did not understand, but I sobbed in her arms because she was sad and lonely. Since then, I have understood; and I can never breathe this pine odor nor look on this view of the ocean without again living over the scene of that day and repeating to myself that marriage when the woman alone loves, is the saddest and most heart-breaking thing that can be.”

“All marriages are not unhappy, my poor, disenchanted little girl.”

“No, but many are! I am twenty-four, and I have

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seen more than one of my friends unhappy, although all had dreamed of perfect happiness."

"I am sixty, Edloe, and my faith is stronger than yours. I have known perfect happiness, and have seen it around me. What I have also seen is that we often control our own destinies; that happiness, though it may waver for a while, may be reconquered and retained. I admit it was not so with your poor mother, whom I dearly loved. In her case there existed one of those terrible fatalities which we seldom encounter. Your father appeared betwitched."

"Yes, my dear mother died of a broken heart—while he was happy. He married the one he adored; he was husband-father. And he even forgot me!"

"He would have taken you with him; but he respected the last wishes of your mother, who left you in her sister's care. Yet he loved you."

"At a distance. But do not believe that I am harsh. I have long forgiven his neglect of me, which at last saved me from a contact that could not be anything but odious to me. Only, I would have wished to kiss him before he died. But all that is now very far away and almost forgotten. I am free to live as I please, to be happy in my own way, which is a great deal."

"Then must I renounce my hopes? I am only an old dreamer. If you only knew how many castles in the air I have built for my two children! I said to myself: Myron is a grave, industrious boy, with a heart of gold, made to appreciate the rare qualities of my little neighbor. Both love the country—long days spent in study, and evenings at home. She will become interested in his work and will help. It will be a union of minds as well as hearts. They are worthy of each other. All conspires in uniting them, age, fortune, family, everything!"

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"And probably, because everything conspires so well, the marriage will never take place! We were brought up together, and Myron always considered me as a comrade, or a sister."

"Yet from his letters it seemed to me that last winter when you met so often this mutual sympathy was assuming a more tender character—that the idea of this so much desired marriage frightened you less than formerly. Myron must, like myself, have deceived himself."

Edloe stood for a few minutes silent, absorbed in reflection, and much agitated by conflicting emotions. At last she turned back to her old friend, and the latter was struck by the painful expression that lingered in her dark eyes.

"Listen to me," said the girl in a suppressed voice; "I will tell you all, and let you read into my heart. My dear dream, the dream I have caressed since childhood, was to be Myron's wife, and to be your daughter. But he does not love me! Do not misunderstand me. Sometimes he believes he loves me, for he has a deep affection and a great esteem for me. He would marry me, believing in good faith that the union would make him happy. He is mistaken! I am sure of it! If ever I marry, I want to be loved and worshiped by my husband. Otherwise marriage would be odious to me—I would die. And I am incapable of inspiring the passion which I know I could give in return. Why, there is something wanting in me—a charm, an attraction, a something, I know not what—which brings love to women less beautiful than myself. I feel it, believe me. I have had many admirers, it is true, for I am rich and intelligent enough to have attracted some. But in most cases the mothers have tried the wooing."

"Like me?"

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"Oh! If you only knew how I wish I could say yes at once and throw myself in your arms to weep for joy!"

"Then you do love him?"

"Perhaps—I question my heart, and yet it seems to me that when we really love there is no need of questioning, we know it. Will you make a compact with me? Myron will spend the summer with you; we are neighbors and intimate friends. I shall bring a little more animation into our lives, and invite some friends to visit me. That will give us many occasions to meet without exciting any comments. Before the autumn, Myron and I will know what to do."

"Shall I tell him this?"

Edloe hesitated a moment, then replied:

"Yes, if you wish it. But it must be well understood that we are both free, absolutely free; that, at the first doubt, one must frankly and loyally say to the other, 'I do not love you as I should,' I know that Myron is worthy of my confidence, and that, like me, he will say anything is preferable to a marriage that would not be a perfect and absolute union! The secret, however, must remain between us only. Say nothing of it to my aunt! She would be so delighted, so exuberant at the prospect of this happiness, that she would frighten me and I would throw up the whole thing."

"Very well, my child, I shall be as silent as the grave. But I hope—I hope——"

The two women had resumed their walk; at the turn of the winding path they met the postman.

"Have you something for me, John?" inquired Edloe.

"Yes, mademoiselle, and if you will take your letters now I shall return by the farmhouse. It will

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save me a good deal of walking," replied the man.

"Give them to me, and tell Duval to give you a good glass of cider."

"Thank you. Your servant, ladies," and, with a bow, John turned slowly into the path that led to the farmhouse.

Edloe looked at the letters, and put them in her pocket.

"Why do you not read them?" asked the baroness.

"Oh! there is no hurry. They are all from old schoolmates. It is curious how all young girls and young women have the same writing, angular, regular, and without expression. Unless I examined these three letters very closely, I should be unable to tell which is from Laura, Rena, or Euphemia. Suppose I invite them for the summer. One with her husband and the other two with their parents. They would make a gay party, and Myron can provide the young men."

They had now reached the white gate that separated the park from a cross road that led from Hanfleur to Trouville. The baroness was almost at home. She kissed Edloe even more tenderly than usual—almost as if she already claimed her as a daughter. The girl instinctively shrank back, her timidity suddenly reawakened.

Edloe returned home by a rough, rocky path that ascended straight to the summit of the hillocks. The pine trees, shrubbery and mossy rock where the butterflies fluttered gaily in the sunshine soon gave place to a deep forest with magnificent trees, whose intertwined branches formed a thick shade.

The path now became narrow, and the young girl soon found herself standing on the highest point of her domain. A large stone cross had been erected on the spot and the trees had been cut down to give

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a sudden view, not only of the ocean, but of the entire surrounding country. And on this beautiful day the panorama seemed like a fairy scene

Edloe seated herself on one of the steps at the foot of the cross, threw her hat back, and took a long breath of the fresh air. Then her gaze wandered far over the sea, now streaked with long, dark lines, and she fell into a reverie. Had she told all, absolutely all to her old friend? Anxiously she sounded the depths of her heart. Then, little by little, without trying to understand why, an immense joy, an ineffable sweetness, a sensation almost of triumph, filled her entire being. Suddenly she murmured aloud: "I love—oh! my God! what happiness! I love, yes, I love with all my heart, with all my strength!"

The June days are deliciously long, and dinner at the chateau was so late that it might well have been called supper. Yet Edloe started at the sound of the first bell that came to her from a distance. She must have been dreaming there for a long time! She arose, then, remembering her letters, sat down once more to read them, thinking she would have time to reach home before the second dinner bell.

One of the letters attracted her attention; the writing, though resembling the others, was not familiar to her. Searching her memory, as we sometimes search when accosted by a person we do not recognize, she again examined the writing, the Paris postmark, the form of the envelope; then, smiling at her hesitation, she opened and read the following lines:

"My Dear Sister: For you are my sister. After my father's death, I found a photograph that he always carried with him. I took possession of it and

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loved it at once. It is the portrait of a little girl with large gray eyes; one of those little girls that never break their dolls, and who, when they find a young bird that has fallen from the nest, take it up and care for it tenderly. I am a fledgling fallen from the nest before my wings have grown. I am all alone in the world, and in my distress I turn to you, my sister, saying, 'Take me, love me, for I love you, although I have never seen you!'

"My mother died more than two years ago. I detest my guardian and he is very anxious to get rid of me. I am still at school, but I am seventeen and weary of it! My mother's family would gladly welcome me, but, if my mother was charming, her family—— Oh, well, how can I explain? Her family belong to the theaters, and the theater does not suit me. My guardian is trying to marry me to some one I don't know, who will take me for my money, and I will not have!

"You are my elder sister, and you must be good, for those eyes cannot lie. Open your arms, my dear sister, that I may nestle into them. I will love you so much, kiss you so heartily and be so good that you will be delighted to have found,

Your little sister,

ALICE LAFAUCHER.

CHAPTER II.

ARRIVAL OF THE NEW SISTER AND MEETING OF THE YOUNG MEN.

The train from Paris dashed into the station at Trouville and two young men jumped lightly to the platform; but as if by common accord they stood near the door of the compartment they had just left. A young girl, so bewitchingly pretty that the hurrying passengers turned to look at her, was preparing to alight in turn, when her skirts caught in the door, and she would have fallen had not the two young men rushed to her assistance.

"Thank you, gentlemen," she murmured sweetly, bestowing a grateful glance at both with touching impartiality.

"What is it, Alice?" asked a dignified matron who accompanied the girl.

"I stumbled, madame, and——"

She did not finish the explanation, but stumbled away impatiently toward the gate.

"Who is she? Where is she going? I know everybody in Trouville and its vicinity, but I never saw this little wonder," said one of the young men as he stood looking after her.

"Let us follow her," said his companion. "We shall find out something about her. She is evidently an aristocrat, and yet there is something about her different from the girls around here."

The speaker was a handsome young man, who, in

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spite of his civilian clothes, betrayed the soldier. His cold gray eyes, his pointed mustache and abrupt manners seemed to indicate that this young officer was anything but a kind superior. His companion was a plainer but a very nice man, with the dreamy blue eyes of a student.

Alice hastened on, her eyes strained, searching for some one among the many persons that awaited the travelers. She knew that a great deal depended on the first meeting; and in her anxiety she completely forgot the two young men, whose evident admiration had amused her during the journey. And yet, admiration was as necessary to her as the air she breathed.

The moment Edloe LaFaucher caught a glimpse of this fresh young face she did not hesitate an instant. She turned slightly pale, but advanced resolutely, and said:

"Your name is Alice LaFaucher, is it not?"

Alice, much agitated and ready to burst into tears, threw herself into her elder sister's arms impulsively.

"My sister," she murmured softly.

Edloe kissed the young girl cordially, and this kiss sealed a resolution to which she had come only after many struggles with herself.

"Why, what a bewitchingly pretty sister I have found," she said kindly, "you are simply exquisite!"

"I am so glad I please you," replied Alice, with an imploring glance.

As Edloe looked up, she saw the two young men who had witnessed the meeting, and her pale face flushed suddenly.

"Myron!" she exclaimed, "your mother did not expect you until to-morrow."

"I wanted to give her a surprise," replied the

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young man, still looking admiringly at the younger sister.

"Well, come with us, we shall leave you at your door;" then, turning to Alice, she added, not without an effort: "My sister, Mlle. Alice LaFauche, M. Le Baron D'Arcy."

The young man bowed low.

A little confusion followed. The teacher who had accompanied Alice wished to return to Paris by the first train, and Myron displayed much zeal in making all necessary arrangements. At last, he took his seat in the landau opposite the two young girls, and, for the first time since his introduction to the radiant beauty, he remembered his friend, who was staring at him enviously.

As he was passing near the carriage, Myron beckoned to him.

"Edloe," he said, "will you allow me to present an old college friend of mine who comes to spend his days of convalescence at Trouville. Captain Stamer will be a precious addition to the parties which my mother informed me you are preparing. Captain Stamer, Mlle LaFaucher."

Then the carriage moved away. The captain stood motionless for an instant, looking after the three young people whose merry laughter came to him. He felt slighted without knowing why, for, after all, Myron had introduced him. But Alice, as she had returned his bow, had given him a long glance. Again it seemed to him that this glance was different from that of other young girls—that it had nothing in common with a convent education. But, after all, she might not have been brought up in a convent! One thing was sure, she was certainly the prettiest girl he had ever seen; with her large, dark eyes—her sister—her sister's eyes—pink cheeks and golden

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hair. What an enchanting and piquant contrast between the sisters! Edloe, on the contrary, was a decided brunette, with olive complexion and glossy black hair. This tall, serious girl was rather handsome, but who would care to give her a second glance when this bewitching little creature was at her side!

Myron was soon deposited at his own gate, and the two sisters were left alone in the carriage once more.

"I am so happy, so happy," murmured Alice softly, as she clasped her sister's hand and looked imploringly into her eyes.

Edloe smiled kindly, won by the caresses of this child, who seemed to beg for affection, claiming protection. She was a naivete that would have melted a heart less tender than hers. She vaguely realized that this sweet and charming way of asking aid and protection must be absolutely irresistible with men. Alice's mother had perhaps looked at her father as Alice was looking at her now. But this thought merely flashed through her mind, as a sharp pain vibrates a wounded nerve. She abandoned herself to the joy of having found a being, weaker than herself, whom she could love and pet to her heart's content. Once Edloe gave her heart, she never took it back. Her first instinct had been to repulse the stranger's child, but she had welcomed her, and now she had adopted her loyally, absolutely.

"My dear Alice," she replied, "I did not tell you all in my letter. My mother's sister, Mme. Vaudery, who brought me up and whom I love very dearly, is living with me. You must try and win her affection, for—it is better you should know it at once—she opposed your coming very strongly."

"It is only natural," replied Alice humbly. "She only sees my poor mamma's daughter in me. I shall do

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all in my power to make her think of me only as your sister."

"How wise and full of common sense you are!" cried Edloe admiringly.

"That is only an elementary principle," said Alice, with a pretty ripple of laughter. "If you only win a person's love you can obtain anything you want."

This profession of faith made the older sister's eyes open wide. But it had been said so simply, as if the declaration admitted of no discussion, and was followed by such pretty babbling on the beauties of the country, on the joys she would find in her existence in the midst of these beautiful surroundings, that Edloe soon forgot the impass—the remark had produced on her.

When the carriage turned into the beautiful avenue that led to the chateau, which was still invisible, Alice became almost thoughtful.

"And all this is yours, all this immense forest?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Edloe, smiling. "We may wander many hours over the grounds without leaving the domain."

"Then you must be rich, very rich."

"Not extravagantly rich. Properties like this one cost so much to keep up, although, as you see, I do not spend much in cultivating it, preferring a forest to a park—and it gives me such small returns. It is a wild luxury which I like. The wealth of my—of our father was divided in two. This property comes from my mother; from what I have learned, you must be richer than I."

"Possibly. Papa speculated with mamma's money and increased it tenfold, so my guardian told me. At all events, there is no danger of either of us dying of starvation. It must be terrible to be poor."

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"Who knows? I would not be afraid to earn my living, at least I hope not."

Alice gave a little shudder of horror—earn a living, work, like those unfortunate under-teachers at the school she had just left! This little animal of luxury would have been incapable of it.

The carriage turned into a wider avenue, shaded by tall beach trees. Suddenly the gray mass of the chateau, with its background of forest, wide, green lawn, flower beds and ancient oaks, came into view.

"Why—it is imposing," declared Alice, "quite like a castle of romance. Are there any ghosts in it?"

Edloe reflected rather sadly that the ghost who would haunt the chateau would be the past in the person of Alice, the daughter of the woman who had cost her mother so many tears. Again she asked herself if her dead mother did not reproach her this welcome, this triumphant entry; her aunt's warning rang in her ears: "You shall see; misfortune will enter this house with the actress daughter."

But Edloe resolutely drove away these thoughts, and, bending over, she kissed her newly-found sister once more.

"No, my darling," she replied, "there are no ghosts in my home. And if there were, your gaiety would drive them away. You are welcome. If I can give you happiness, you shall have it. I promise it."

Much moved and a little frightened by her big sister's serious words, Alice looked at her with childish eyes full of tears; then, in an outburst of sincere gratitude, she said:

"I judged you rightly, Edloe, or I never would have dared write to you. Papa often said to me, 'If ever you are in need of aid or protection, my little Alice, call on your sister—it will not be in vain, I assure you!' And how many times I have thought

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of his words! Only how can I explain myself?—do not expect too much from me. I am not wicked, but I am afraid I am not very good. Yet it seems to me that with you I may learn to be much better. You will help me? Until now, I have thought of nothing but amusing myself to the best of my ability. That is not quite your ideal of a girl, is it?”

She made this confession in a half-serious, half-bantering tone, hoping to make a good impression on her sister. The latter smiled kindly, saying: “I love you as you are. Be always frank and loyal. It is all I ask of you.”

The servants, curious to see the new “young lady,” had assembled on the steps to welcome her. Alice responded to their bows with a gracious smile, and was at once voted “charming, very pretty and not proud.”

Mme. Vaudery was not there, however. They found her in her boudoir, half concealed behind an enormous frame, on which she was embroidering.

“Aunt Louise, here is my sister Alice.” Edloe said these words with a particular emphasis. She was very fond of her aunt, but, after all, she alone was mistress at the chateau, and, when necessary, she did not hesitate to assert herself.

The aunt’s hands, however, suddenly became so entangled in silks and wool that she could only offer one finger to the newcomer; then she again vanished behind her frame without deigning to notice the discomfiture depicted on the pretty face of Alice.

“Good-day, mademoiselle. I hope you had a pleasant journey. Very dusty, is it not? I detest traveling by rail,” was her cold greeting.

“Thank you, madame, the journey was pleasant enough. But, I beg of you, my name is Alice, and Edloe calls me that.”

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"Humph! Edloe may do as she pleases. It was she invited you; she pretends you are her sister. That may all be very true. But if I am her aunt, I am not yours. Her mother was my sister, a sister I loved very dearly."

"I know it, madame. You do not wish my presence here. It is only natural. But if you would only look into my eyes—like that—you would see that I am not wicked; that I would be grieved to be the cause of any trouble between you and my sister, and that I will do all in my power that you may one day forgive me—for being my mother's daughter."

Then, overcome by emotions she had already undergone during the day, and this first resistance, although expected, Alice burst into tears, sobbing violently like a child who wants to be soothed and consoled.

Annoyed by this scene, Mme. Vaudrey suddenly emerged from behind her screen, saying coldly:

"There, mademoiselle, there—Alice!"

"Forgive me, madame," sobbed Alice, nestling closer to her sister. "I am not doing it on purpose. I could not help it. It is all over now."

"Then I suppose I must kiss you to seal the peace."

"Oh! if you would only not hate me."

"But it is not you, it is the past I hate. Come! We will say no more about it. There, are you satisfied?"

And Aunt Louise imprinted a kiss on the girl's forehead, unable to resist Edloe's imploring glance.

The storm had abated as quickly as it had come up. Alice laughed through her tears and thanked Mme. Vaudrey in little phrases intermingled with stifled sobs.

Edloe now hurried off to her room. As she looked after the two girls, the elder one's arm around her

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sister's waist, Aunt Louise muttered: "Well, if anybody had told me that I would kiss her—but, with those eyes, she can twist any one around her finger. Edloe is fairly bewitched. Bah! we shall soon marry her off and be left in peace. But there is no denying that she is beautiful——"

Edloe's apartments consisted of a large room overlooking the garden and a boudoir in the large tower at the right of the castle. This circular boudoir was a delicious retreat. The wall was so thick that the sill of the narrow windows, which were provided with cushions, made a cozy seat, from which a beautiful view of the surrounding country could be seen. A narrow, winding stairway, also cut into the thick wall, led to the garden through a small door which no one but Edloe used. This same little stairway also led to the floor above, but the apartments there were seldom used. Next to the bedroom and opening into it was another very large and pleasant room.

"This will be your room, Alice; that is, if it pleases you," said Edloe, as she opened the door. If you prefer it, however, I shall have the apartments above mine prepared for you. But I thought—especially if you are afraid of ghosts—that you would prefer to remain under my wing. You may share my boudoir; as you see, there is a piano, books, a desk, and it is quite large enough for both."

"I want to be near you, Edloe, always near you. I am so happy with you. And what a pretty room you have given me! Oh! how happy we shall be together."

She flitted about, nervous and excited, anxious to visit the castle at once, while the maid opened her trunks and put the room in order.

The back of the chateau was very irregular, with

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its funnel-shaped turrets, old-fashioned wings and a number of small interior courtyards paved with enormous stone flags; all built at divers times, according to the needs of the hour. It presented a vivid contrast with the plain, almost severe facade. Further on were the barns and stables; then the kitchen garden and the vast orchard, and beyond that the silent forest spreading on all sides.

Alice was in ecstasy and clapped her hands in delight at the thought of living in the midst of these charming surroundings. How she would amuse herself in playing the farm maid. But ideas of country life were somewhat confused in this giddy little brain.

"And you will give great fêtes?" she cried delightedly, "and have lots of visitors. How delightful! That gentleman—what do you call him—said so. How queer he never thought of marrying you, since you are neighbors. The country makes one feel like marrying——"

"As you see, you are mistaken, since I am still single."

"Your turn will come. That gentleman pleases me very much, although he is a little round shouldered; he must write a great deal. His friend, the military man, is also charming. We traveled in the same compartment all the way. And what fun I had! They both looked at me constantly. And I dropped my handkerchief several times to see them scramble for it. Once they knocked their heads together and I almost laughed aloud. Then, as I was getting off, I nearly fell, and both rushed to my assistance. Each received one of my smiles in return, so that neither is jealous of the other."

"I hope you are not a flirt, my dear Alice," said

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Edloe, gravely, only half pleased by this childish prattle.

“I don’t know, but I am afraid I must be—but then I told you I was not good.”

CHAPTER III.

THE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THEM.

Edloe had never had a close friend to whom she could confide her girlish secrets, her schoolmates having been nothing more than companions. This may explain why she had early begun to keep a dairy. She loved to analyze her thoughts and sentiments, and confided all to her journal with absolute sincerity. This she called the examination of her heart. Often, when the rest of the household was buried in profound slumber, Edloe unlocked her secretary and took out a book which no eyes but hers had ever seen. Carefully stowed in another compartment were several similar volumes containing a faithful record of all the thoughts and incidents of former years. Sometimes she opened one at random, and found long-forgotten events, which, at the time had seemed of supreme importance; enthusiasms that had quickly died out, childish griefs that provoked a smile, beginnings of romances which had never gone beyond the first chapter, declarations and opinions of eighteen which now made her blush. But she preserved them all, for she thus learned to know herself and be indulgent to those who, in their turn, matured slowly, displaying intolerance, violence, thoughtlessness. Just as the fruits are bitter and acid before ripening—she also learned to be patient and not despair with herself when she found herself giving away to pride and intolerance.

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One night, when her sister had fallen into the deep slumber of a child weary of play, Edloe took out her dairy and resumed her writing.

"Nothing since. It is not indolence, neither is it the gay life we have led for the past week, that has prevented me from writing; it is rather that I did not clearly read within my own heart, or, perhaps, that I would not write now.

"When that child entered my life I was thinking of making a radical change in it. I was beginning to whisper to myself very low and timidly: 'I love.' The pride which made me silent and cold to Myron, that made me assume the defensive the moment his mother tried to speak of him, was insensibly melting away, and I was happy! I feared that I was not loved as intensely as I wished to be loved, that Myron would marry me because the union seemed to be desirable in the eyes of our families and of the world. Since a few months, this fear was sweetly fading away. In Paris we met very often. When Myron entered our little boudoir his eyes sparkled, and then there was a smile on his lips. This seemed to say that he was happy to be at my side. He never posed as a lover, but we both knew that we had been destined to each other for many years, and we conversed freely, like comrades and devoted, almost affectionate friends. If I admired a book or play, it always happened that he was also very enthusiastic over it. His work interested me, and I was of some little service to him, by reading and making notes of certain German words that treated of the subject on which he was writing. 'What a delight it is to work with you, Edloe,' he observed one day. 'I see better through your eyes than through my own!' And suddenly there arose a vision of another existence, a united, happy, perhaps somewhat serious life, but full

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of tenderness and sweetness. That day he held my hand in his a little longer than usual, and I made no attempt to withdraw it. Oh, how happy I was, no one knows.

"And since that moment I feel that I love him, that I love him with all the strength and passion of my nature. I try to hide my feelings; and that fear, the fear of loving more than I am loved, makes me cold, distant and constrained. And yet——

"His mother must have repeated our conversation to him. Yesterday, for the first time since his return, we were alone for an instant. After breakfast, at Alice's request, we went out to choose a favorable spot for lawn tennis. The young officer, Allen Stamer, whom, I must admit, I half dislike, had gone off with my sister and the rest, while Myron and I remained on the lawn.

"‘Edloe,’ he said suddenly, in a voice that grated harshly on my ears, ‘it is unworthy of us to remain in this false position. We meet and act as if—as if there existed no understanding between us. And yet we are to be married some day, are we not?’

"I felt chilled—but why? What demon makes me so cold when my heart is overflowing? Was it, perhaps, that I missed a certain vibration in his voice, a something that would have cried out louder than his words! ‘Do you not see that I love you?’

"Before replying I turned away to pluck a rose, and, without even a tremor in my voice, said:

"‘No, Myron; I will have no engagement. Let us remain free as we are. At the end of the summer, we shall either part good friends or marry. Until then, let us be free, absolutely free. And if then one of us can say ‘I do not love you as I should,’ let us promise each other to feel nothing but grati-

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tude; for the greatest disloyalty would be to marry without love.'

"Myron gazed at me for a long time in silence. He seemed to be searching in my face for something that was not there; just as a few moments before I had listened to his voice, trying to discover a tremor I did not hear. I felt like marble, so great was my effort to dominate my feelings. For at that moment it almost seemed a disloyalty to let him see how much I loved him. Then, with a sigh of discouragement or impatience, I know not which, he turned away and said in an injured tone:

"'I admire your calmness and good sense. Remain free. As for me, until you say clearly:

"'I do not love you, I shall consider you my fiancée.'

"'No, no; that would be unjust!' I cried.

"I trembled with emotion and my voice sounded strangely even to my own ears. He, perhaps, saw that my calmness was only assumed, for he said:

"'As you please, Edloe.'

"'But no one must suspect——'

"'No one shall suspect. Besides,' he added, with a tinge of bitterness, 'it would be difficult for one to believe us anything more than old friends, from your attitude towards me.'"

This was a strange betrothal. It seemed rather a struggle between two strong wills. And yet, in spite of all, I am happy. It also seems to me that, since our explanation, Myron is more at ease. This man, whose youth has been spent in serious study, has always been wanting in gaiety, and now he seems to be making up for lost time, taking an absolute holiday, and enjoying himself like a schoolboy. His mother is radiant. I am happy in the joyous atmosphere that surrounds us, and feel rejuvenated. I am

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filled with strong impulse to sing, to run, to commit a thousand follies. I scarcely recognize my old self; and Aunt Louise, seeing me so happy, almost forgives Alice, for she attributes this sudden change to her.

“And, indeed, Alice is partly the cause of it. Her budding youth fills the air with joy, and upsets the tranquillity of the old chateau. She must have noise, bustle and change, hers is not a contemplative nature and her enthusiasm for the country would soon die out if it presented nothing but the cares of a poultry yard, the worlds in the field or garden. She has nothing of the peasant, but the life of a chatelaine suits her best. Mme. D’Arcy, like the rest, fell in love with her at once, and together they have planned excursions to the forest of Tonques, also dances, and I know not what else. Myron often invites his friends, and all these young men go straight to my little sister. That something which attracts, that mysterious gift which is independent of beauty, that particular charm of the universally adored woman—in a word, that something which is wanting in me, The peasants who bow respectfully to me turn to look at her; even the animals feel this curious magnetism, the birds do not fly away at her approach, the dogs beg for her caresses. Everywhere and to everybody she is a sovereign, a beloved and adored being. I do not know if she is fully conscious of her power; but she is certainly happy and enjoys it like a veritable child. She is one of those penitents who, thanks to a past confession and sure of a future absolution, continues to sin with perfect impunity, believing herself almost authorized. And is always being remonstrated with.

“But she is so childish, so affectionate, so grateful for the love I shower upon her, and so caressing

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withal, that I cannot help forgiving her. 'Caressing,' sneered Aunt Louise, the other day, 'yes, indeed, but so is my cat when she wants something! Notwithstanding this severity, however, Aunt Louise is also bewitched by the charms of this magician. I do not think Alice endowed with extraordinary intelligence, and doubt if ever the great problems of right or wrong, of the immortality of the soul, or even of the social questions have troubled her sleep. But in worldly matters she is shrewd. Then she wants to be loved by all and forever, and she has a thousand ways of attaining her ends. In Aunt Louise she at once discovered an artist who in default of pencils and paints achieves marvels with her needles. Alice may, perhaps, know how to hem a handkerchief—which I doubt—but she requested Aunt Louise with imperturbable gravity to initiate her into the mysteries of that delicate and complicated embroidery of which she makes draperies, entire pieces of furniture, exquisite things, so beautiful that we dare not use them. The enthusiastic young novice even prevailed upon her to let her see the old vestments and church ornaments obtained at great expense from a curiosity shop. Only! she cautioned Alice, 'you must not tell M. Le. Wellington; he so naively admires all I do, if he only suspected!' And the little hypocrite answered gravely, 'Oh, that would be betraying the professional secret, since I aspire to become your pupil.' Aunt Louise has a peculiar way of sniffing when she doubts anything; she sniffed noisily as she muttered: 'That little hypocrite is laughing at me.' But the little hypocrite spent a whole hour trying to learn a stitch while she chattered very sensibly. I was making a pretense of reading during this scene, and could scarcely keep a straight face. My aunt's severity melted before my

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eyes. That hour of patience achieved more for this intruder—as Aunt Louise still called her. It is true that when the hour was up Alice folded her work and put it away in a pretty little work basket which naturally is seldom used, and said, sweetly, ‘Come, Edloe, let us take a run in the park.’ Aunt Louise shrugged her shoulders, but looked at her pupil with a smile full of maternal indulgence. A little more and she will be conquered.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESIRE OF HIS MOTHER.

Nature had apparently destined Myron D'Arcy for a life of gaiety and idleness. He was the only son of a widow, free, handsome, the possessor of a rich estate, and nothing drove him to grave studies or great ambitions. Happily for him, at the age when young men usually dissipate, he felt attracted toward intellectual pursuits. As a pupil of the Ecole des Chartres, he had early distinguished himself among his classmates by displaying a wonderful talent as historian, and, while still young, he had conceived the idea of works to be entitled "History of the Duke of Winchester in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." This undertaking required innumerable researches, years of work and travel, and would have proved beyond the reach of less favored individuals. Notwithstanding these advantages, however, he had attained the age of twenty-eight and the first chapter of his book was still unwritten. Notes accumulated, his sphere of studies widened, but the result seemed far from encouraging. He had, nevertheless, abstracted a few amusing details from this mass of documents, and given them to the world through the *Revue Historique*, and the articles had been well received. He had dominated a small subject, he would one day triumph over a great one. He would be a great writer in the true sense of the word, and, though his vast undertaking arose before

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him more and more formidable every day, he would conquer it. Victory was still far away, no doubt, but it would come; he could be patient, since he felt his strength.

This secret interior struggle, which had absorbed all his thoughts and energy, made him taciturn, and as the years passed away, more silent and reserved. He loved his mother tenderly, but he could not initiate her into his ambitions, dreams and doubts of himself, for she would have suffered without understanding.

What she certainly could not understand was the life of seclusion led by this big boy of hers, who could be gay and even boisterous when the occasion presented itself.

Naturally Mme. D'Arcy was anxious to see him marry, and Edloe LaFaucher, in her eyes, and in the eyes of the world in general, was the ideal wife for a serious man like her son. For several years Myron refused to hear of marriage. Then, each time he met Edloe, he became more interested in her, and finally admitted that, in fact, she did not resemble ordinary girls, who were greedy of amusements, luxury and change. The attraction he had felt for her visibly increased during that winter in Paris, and the young man sincerely believed himself in love with his charming neighbor, and began to look forward to a life of sweet happiness spent with this intellectual and somewhat grave woman.

When his mother, a little frightened at the initiative she had taken, timidly related the conversation that had taken place between Edloe and herself, Myron remained silent for a moment, then, kneeling before her, he clasped her in his arms and said:

"Then it would make you happy to have a daughter as well as a son?"

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"So happy, my dear boy."

"I can well understand it, my dear mother, for I am continually buried in my dusky documents, and am becoming very unsociable."

"But I don't want you to marry for me, my son. If you love Edloe, marry her; but if you do not love her, it would be a cruel error for her as well as for you."

"What a sentimental mother you are," he laughed. "I love Edloe very much, and believe I have always felt a great affection for her. But is it a passion? I believe not. After all, perhaps I am incapable of feeling that passion. If Edloe becomes my wife, as I say it, an ineffable sweetness invades my heart, and who knows? it may be love if she becomes my wife, I swear that she shall be happy and I shall be contented. Does that suffice you?"

"It suffices me, but it will not satisfy her. Edloe has seen her mother suffer, and children have a wonderful faculty of understanding griefs. But, then, you have the whole season before you to decide."

"I prefer to decide at once. Once my word is given, I would look neither to the right nor to the left; but those half engagements are really no engagement."

"It will disturb your studies, will it not?" said the mother, with a smile.

"Perhaps."

It may have been that, but there was also another reason. In evoking Edloe's image, Myron always saw it accompanied by another. The two inseparable sisters formed a striking contrast; the one tall, slender, with beautiful deep, grave eyes; the other, small, dazzling with sunshine, dimples and exquisite colorings, whose every glance attracted, whose every smile enchanted and bewitched. And he was not

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sure that he listened to the grave voice rather than to the pearly laugh; that his gaze followed the dignified, stately figure, rather than the dimpled, childish face. This resulted in an uneasiness he refused to define, almost a remorse that he could not analyze.

And he regretted more and more each day not to have bound himself by lover's vow to the woman he still desired to marry.

Not only was he free from vows, but no one seemed to suspect that a closer intimacy than in the past existed between them, not even Aunt Louise, who had renounced her fruitless remonstrances and almost resigned herself to the idea that Edloe would remain single. Myron visited the chateau more frequently than in the past, but Alice's presence and the gay parties daily gathered there explained the change. Moreover, the young man declared that, having overworked himself during the winter, he intended to take an absolute vacation, to live an outdoor life, to swim, to ride, to dance and commit a thousand follies and somehow or other the chateau was always on his way.

He was always accompanied by his old comrade, Captain Stamer. Though of diametrically opposite characters, they had always been intimate friends at college, their very difference of temperament producing an attraction they could not resist. Captain Stamer had early announced his intention of entering the military school, and affected great contempt for "bookworms."

He was naturally of violent temper, and somewhat brutal, believing physical force the supreme argument in all disputes. But Myron having repeatedly proved that he did not excel in moral reasonings only, the young officer conceived a certain respect for

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that "bookworm" who possessed powerful muscles and knew how to use them, too.

Under this apparent intimacy, however, the old friction was often felt, less openly than in their college days, perhaps, but deeper and more seriously. Military life had developed the captain's brutality, and he often boasted of the fear he inspired in the men under his command, regretting that the practice of torturing them was not permitted as in other places, claiming that an army is really strong only when the soldiers are reduced to automatons.

One day he related before the two sisters how he had tortured a soldier, never losing sight of him, always discovering him in fault, overwhelming him with abuse, punishments, humiliations; in fact, treating him like a brute. Then suddenly, the brute rebelled again, the soldier disappeared and was inscribed as a deserter.

"It was a good riddance," he concluded, "for his example had a bad effect on the rest."

"And, thanks to you, there is one man's life ruined," cried Edloe, indignantly. "I do not congratulate you on the fact, captain."

"The cockle must be plucked from the grain, mademoiselle. Blind obedience is the soldier's first duty, and an indispensable quality."

"It also seems to me that other qualities besides severity are indispensable in an officer," retorted the girl, with flushed cheeks.

Alice had listened in silence. The young officer, with his cold, gray eyes, attracted her strangely. She considered Edloe very severe in her judgment, and admired the captain for his bantering replies, as if, in fact, feminine appreciation in such matters could not be treated seriously. It pleased her very much, and flattered her vanity, to think that this

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man, who was feared by his soldiers, who was capable of violence, even injustice, could be so gentle and submissive to her, for the captain was her slave. He was ever at her side, showering a thousand delicate little attentions on her, flushing with joy or turning pale with fear, according to her cold or gracious treatment of him. This amused the coquet very much. Edloe's remonstrances were of no avail, and for the first time she realized that being weak and malleable in appearance often possesses a power of resistance and elastic obstinacy that nothing can overcome. Reasoning is powerless with such natures. "Since it amuses me," was Alice's only reply. The entire universe and all its inhabitants were, in her opinion, created for Mlle. Alice LaFaucher's sole pleasure because she was so pretty, charming and exquisite.

Besides, she was so loving and caressing that Edloe soon ceased her homilies. After all, Captain Stamer could take care of himself, and all she asked was that Alice should not marry him.

Marry him? Oh, no, indeed! Become the wife of an officer and be dragged from garrison to garrison, to hear of nothing but drilling or promotion of a favorite comrade! No, never! Besides to be called Mme. Stamer, she who loved only pretty names with—and the foolish child stopped, confused and flushed.

"You are a preacher in petticoats!" cried Alice, as Edloe attempted to renew her expostulations. "But, my dear sister, you might as well resign yourself to it. I shall never be perfect, read serious books, nor become a remarkable woman. Oh! you need not frown, the whole world myself included, recognizes that you are remarkable. Mme. D'Arcy never utters your name without proclaiming your merits, her stu-

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dious son entertains you with the progress of his works—what an hour!—but how tiresome it must be! No one ever dreams of talking to me about anything but bathing, dancing, or other gay, pretty and delicious things. I am nothing but a petted child—although I am shrewd enough, I assure you—a weak being, who must be treated with sweet tenderness, who must be fed on bonbons, who must be adorned and perpetually smiling, whose mission in this world is to be pretty and allow herself to be protected. If you think I do not see and understand, you are mistaken. I am not the doll that they think me. I know very well what I want and what I am doing. I have a will, too, I assure you!”

As she went on she became more and more excited, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled.

“What is all this about, Alice?” said Edloe quietly. “You are what you are—that is, simply adorable!”

Even the most violent emotions were of short duration in Alice. She burst into a laugh and crept into her sister’s arms with so much caressing affection that Edloe was quite touched.

“Then you truly love me, Edloe?” she murmured.

“I love you blindly. Until now my heart has remained closed, but it has opened for you—you whom I repulsed at first. I love you as a sister, almost as a mother. I want you to be happy and good, good above all. There is nothing I would not do to make you happy.”

“Nothing?” whispered the young sister.

“Nothing.”

Alice was silent for a moment, then, with a serious expression, she said:

“Listen to me, Edloe. It seems to me that I am robbing you. You believe me better, more affectionate, more worthy of being loved than I really am.

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I have tried more than once to make you understand that I have many faults, but you will not believe me. I have not wished to deceive you, for you are ten thousand times better than I."

"Love me, Alice; it is all I ask."

"Oh! as for that——"

And a tender kiss terminated the phrase.

CHAPTER V.

DINNER IN HONOR OF THE NEWCOMER.

Since the death of her beloved husband, six years before, Mme. D'Arcy had lived in strict retirement. For the first time, she now resolved to open her doors to society. The neighboring chateaux, villas and manors were crowded with visitors, and Mme. D'Arcy had only to make a sign to be surrounded by the notables of the country.

She sent out invitations to a dinner in honor of Alice LaFaucher, whose arrival at the chateau of Côte-Boisee had occasioned so much comment.

Everybody knew the story of "that poor little Mme. LaFaucher"—as they still call her—who had died of grief, and the adoption of this half-sister by Mlle. LaFaucher; the admission of the enemy's child in the victim's house, had been diversely criticised.

The curé approved his young parishioner openly. She had accomplished a duty, a difficult, even painful duty, and there, at least, virtue had brought its own reward. In tearing this charming child from dangerous surroundings, where her soul was in peril, in removing her from the contact of relatives more or less connected with the theater, Edloe has secured a gay, young companion, an affectionate and grateful sister, who charmed every one. Even M. le —, the best of men, while delivering his Sunday sermon, gazed with admiration at the pew of the chateau. Alice always attended the services with the most de-

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mure little air in the world; once she had even taken up the collection, and M. le ———, like the rest of his parishioners, succumbed to the charm of her bewitching beauty.

Mme. D'Arcy's house was a large, modern structure in the style of the Italian villas. The roof was flat and surrounded by a balustrade, and the view from it was so beautiful that they often spent their evenings there. At the back of the house could be seen the thick forest that stretched along the hillocks; but the widow's favorite site was the vast garden that sloped to the road. Here she gave full sway to a passion for flowers. None in the neighborhood could boast of such a green lawn or magnificent roses as bloomed in the beds. The most varied and rarest specimens were displayed in all corners, perfuming the air with their fragrance. The only fault Mme. D'Arcy ever found with Edloe was that she preferred the forest to her garden, to dream the hours away in sombre paths instead of cultivating these bright blossoms. But perfection is not of this world!

The sisters, accompanied by Aunt Louise, arrived early on the day of the dinner, that they might enjoy the beautiful June afternoon in the midst of the delicious perfume of roses, then in all their splendor. Both were dressed in white, but Edloe's soft woolen dress was a little severe, without the least bit of lace, while Alice's costume of mousseline de soie was brightened by knots of pale pink ribbon that set off her delicate blonde beauty and dark eyes. Aunt Louise was forced to admit that she had never seen a more fascinating or bewitchingly pretty creature. And as demure as a little saint withal! She never left her sister's side and did her best to subdue her merry laughter and coquettish instincts, that she might receive her sister's praises on their return; but,

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whenever she did raise her pretty eyes, they were none the less brilliant, and the dimples suddenly reappeared more bewitching than ever in her dazzling smile.

As Alice had seen only the drawing room and garden, Myron escorted the sisters through the property. The grounds sloped so rapidly that the back of the house they were almost on a level with the second story. One of the walks led directly to a large room filled with books and a desk littered with papers. Alice peeped in curiously.

"Is this where you work, Monsieur D'Arcy?" she asked. "Is this where you write that terribly serious book I have been told about?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, I am very quiet here, this corner of the garden is almost always deserted, as you see, I can step right into the forest."

"Admit that you seldom use the door, but jump right out of the window," laughed Edloe.

"True enough," assented Myron. "It is a habit of my boyhood, which I have never given up. It is so convenient, and one need not to be an acrobat to get in the same way. You see that these houses, built contrary to common sense, have some good points."

"And are you not afraid? If you can get in so easily, others can do as much. I would dream of nothing but burglars, if I slept in such a room!" cried Alice, who never posed as a brave girl.

"There is not the least danger, mademoiselle. Besides, look at that pretty revolver over there, which my mother insists on keeping near me. It has not been taken out of its case for years. Moreover she has provided me with that beautiful panoply, less as an ornament for the chimney piece than to make people think me of a belligerent disposition. But I trust more to the honesty of the people than to a

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false reputation. But come, let us visit the barns, fields and park. It will take a full hour before dinner. Mother has not slept for a week, for fear her dinner will not be worthy of the occasion. Come, let us get up an appetite."

While the young people wandered through the gardens the two matrons sat quietly chatting in the drawing room. After a last tour of inspection through the kitchen and dining room Mme. D'Arcy was now ready to receive her guests. Mme. Vaudery and herself were intimate friends, and yet it would have been difficult to find two women more dissimilar. The baroness was a dreamer, still young in heart; preserved so, perhaps by her isolated life. She had let her watch run down on the day of her husband's death, and had never thought of winding it up since; she lived entirely in the past, and even her deep maternal love had not been sufficient to reawaken her to the interests of the present day.

Her neighbor, on the contrary, had early resigned herself to partial happiness. She claimed that the little satisfactions of life, skilfully cultivated, form a very acceptable semblance of happiness, that to reawaken sleeping sorrows was folly; that laughter was the right of mankind, and it was the height of absurdity to deprive one's self of it. The more so since laughter, according to her, comprised an infinity of agreeable things, like good eating, luxury, the contact of witty persons, when we are lucky enough to meet them, or to be satisfied with agreeable and cultivated friends when the former are not available.

"It seems to me that your son is becoming younger," said Mme. Vaudery to the baroness; "there he is, laughing as if he had never poked his nose in the dusty archives of foreign affairs."

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"Heaven be thanked! But you must remember that I always predicted that Myron would grow younger with time. He was too serious at twenty—it was not natural, and then——"

Mme. D'Arcy's tongue itched to tell Aunt Louise all her hopes, but she stopped short. Had she not promised Edloe that she would be silent? If Aunt Louise would only guess! It seemed to her that this change in Myron was significant enough.

"And then," interposed Mme. Vaudery, "there is nothing like a pair of bright eyes to dissipate the mists of study. Come, my friend, do not look so bewildered, for you know as well as I do that since Alice's arrival Myron has abandoned his books. If he does not know he is in love, I do."

"You are mistaken; you are mistaken, I assure you," protested the baroness, quickly.

"Tut, tut, tut, I am rarely mistaken in these matters. Since I have become a mere spectator, I keep my glasses in order, and find great amusement in watching those little manoeuvres. After all, my good friend, you have nothing to complain of, you desired Mlle. LaFaucher as a daughter-in-law, and this one is charming. I am not much in love with her, but I admit that she is truly bewitching."

"And," added her friend, who was beginning to recover her composure, "you would be delighted to get rid of her by marrying her off as quickly as possible."

"Certainly! She disturbs my old habits. Then I am afraid I shall finally succumb to her charms. I struggle against it, and it is really tiresome."

"Then, even you admit that she is exquisite," said the baroness, whose maternal egotism was aroused at the thought that Myron might possibly prefer the

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younger sister—for, after all, there was no positive engagement.

"If I admit it! Why, since I know her, I almost forgive my brother-in-law. The old legend of sirens will be repeated as long as the world lasts. Alice is the picture of her mother, except her eyes, which she inherits from her father. I often went in secret to see her mother on the stage, and such an actress I never saw; such fascination, such grace, such charm—in fact, she possessed everything but a heart. In the daughter, I find the same intonations of the voice, the same smile that suddenly illuminates the face like a ray of sunshine through a passing cloud. Look at her, when we sit down we simply take a chair to rest, and our skirts fall around us as best they may, while Alice's dress arranges itself gracefully into harmonious folds; when she speaks, her gestures are rounded, never angular, and all that is so natural; her words are never confused, each syllable has its value, her voice is modulated with an art that is innate in her. Elocution was inculcated in her, by simply listening to her mother."

"But," observed her friend, "you say that her mother possessed everything but a heart. Does Alice resemble her in that respect also?"

"I have not yet solved that problem. It is possible that she may have one. To see her with Edloe, one would swear it. She overwhelms her with caresses, follows here everywhere like a child, tries to help her with the management of the house and gets everything in a muddle, of course. She rushes to give orders to the farmers, forgets all about them, and stops to play with the chickens or the dogs, just because Edloe also loves chickens and dogs. She is always gay, admires everything, goes into ecstasies over the scenery, splashes delightedly in the water,

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walks, runs, and leads her sister about, while she seems to be following her. But this is a new play-thing. The country in July, with its noisy roads, innumerable bathers, chateaux filled with guests, is well enough. But wait till November, when she is reduced to our quiet society."

"Youth finds happiness everywhere and always," murmured the baroness, indulgently. "In any case, it is evident that Edloe loves her very much and will do anything for her."

"If she entices her to Paris a month or two earlier than usual, I shall not complain, for my part. Still, Edloe is by no means weak; if she considers it her duty to resist any whim, she will resist, you may be sure. Then, we shall see. Alice reminds me of the soft, supple silk I use in my embroidery. It threads easily, caresses the fingers, and lends itself to our wishes; then, suddenly, without apparent cause, it forms a small, almost imperceptible knot and breaks the needle short. So far, no knot has appeared, but it may come yet."

The knot appeared before the end of the evening.

The dinner was a success. The guests were mostly young, eager for amusement, and did full justice to the numerous dishes. The table was decorated with the most beautiful flowers from the garden, and the wide open windows admitted the balmy air of the beautiful summer evening. Alice began to forget her resolutions. She felt that she was incontestably the queen of the feast, the prettiest and most admired of all the women present, and the joy of her triumph was betrayed in her merry laugh and the brightness of her eyes. Captain Stamer was her neighbor, and she amused herself by completely turning his head. Myron, who, in his capacity as host was seated between two elderly matrons, shot envious glances at

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the corner where Alice enlivened everything by her Parisian wit.

Fully conscious of these glances, she redoubled her coquetry. Edloe was too far away to check her sister's exuberance; besides, everybody was gay and it was hard to lecture this child for a few pearly laughs. Then, the dear little Alice was so pretty and admired. The thought of her being jealous of this newcomer, who eclipsed her so completely, never even crossed her mind. On the contrary, she was extremely proud of her little sister's beauty and success.

After dinner, they drank coffee in the garden, and Edloe came to her sister's side and clasped her arm around her waist. The young people formed a gay and noisy group, the moon shone with extraordinary brilliancy, and it was almost as light as day.

"You are very warm, Alice," observed Edloe as she noticed her flushed cheeks. "Put this lace scarf around your neck. Do you know, Mademoiselle, that you were very noisy at dinner? What have you done with that exemplary behavior of the first part of the day?"

"I have passed it to you, Edloe, it never inconveniences you. I cannot endure it more than an hour at a time. Ah! let me be a little wild. It is so good to be foolish, and also, one is seventeen only twelve months. If you knew what projects we have formed. Ah! what fun we shall have, shall we not, Captain?"

And what are those projects?" asked Edloe, smiling indulgently.

"Shall I take part in them?" broke in Myron, coming near, not daring to ask himself which of the two sisters attracted him there.

"Of course you shall, so will the Captain, and all these gentlemen. We shall be eight young girls and

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we must have escorts. To begin with, Monday we shall breakfast at the Georgia fountain, shall we not Edloe?"

"Then we shall play a comedy. Society comedies are so amusing, especially in the country. The large drawing-room with the little boudoir is just suited for the purpose. The Captain is an admirable actor, and I——"

Alice stopped short. Her sister had withdrawn her arm and seemed very pale in the moonlight.

"Not that, Alice not that!" she exclaimed, in an altered voice.

"Why not?" asked the young girl, angrily, her pretty face clouding up at this first contradiction to her caprices.

"Drawing-room comedies are, no doubt, very amusing things for theatres; but very tiresome for the others, I assure you."

"But we shall all be actors, the young people at least; and the others don't count."

"In my house, the others do count, Alice. We shall have no comedy."

This was said in a tone that admitted of no reply. They all understood that Edloe had not given the true reason of her antipathy to theatricals. Alice raised her head haughtily; her features assumed a cold, harsh expression, and she said, nonchalantly:

"As you wish, of course. Monsieur D'Arcy, please give me your arm. I would like to admire the view from the terrace. We can go up, can we not? Come all, I am sure that in this moonlight the sea must be perfectly wonderful!"

Edloe did not follow them. Something in the manner Alice had taken Myron's arm had struck her. She turned back and took a seat beside Mme. D'Arcy. The baroness took her hand affectionately,

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as if to beg forgiveness for her infidelity during the conversation with Aunt Louise.

"Are you ill, Edloe?" she said, "shall we go in?"

"Oh no, we are so comfortable here."

"Then what is it?"

"I am a little sad, that is all. It is a strange contradiction of my nature that makes me sad when others are gay. But what will you do. I am no longer eighteen. As Alice says, one is eighteen only twelve months. Was I ever eighteen? I begin to fear not."

"That will come, my dear. Like Myron, you will grow younger with time."

"Perhaps!" murmured the girl, "In fact, this evening Myron is very young."

And she fell into a sad reverie.

CHAPTER VI.

PICNIC.

The road that leads to "Fontain De Georgia" ascends rapidly between the high walls of vast estates, through the gates of which can be seen well kept gardens, chateaux, villas, and prosperous farms. Half way up the hillock is a path, in which carriages seldom venture. It is a very solitary and silent place, where even the barking of a dog awakens strange echoes. Soon the forest becomes thicker, the sea is lost to sight, and nothing is heard but the abrupt flight of the startled bird or the rustling of leaves in the soft summer breeze. Then, suddenly a rustic bridge is reached, and on the other side of the stream is a clearing, devoid of underbrush, and shaded by enormous beech-trees. In the very middle, almost at the foot of the oldest and most venerable tree, spurts a spring of clear cool water that forms into a crystal pond before running into the brook. A prettier spot for love, happiness, and gaiety, could not be found; it is the domain of Queen Edloe.

To please her sister, Edloe had organized a picnic on this charming spot, and had redoubled in kindness and affection to make her forget her contradiction concerning the comedy. Alice was not angry, oh, no! But, now and then, a light cloud on the young face, an almost perceptible sigh, showed that this little creature was thinking of things she could not

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speak of. For the first time, her caprices were not law. She was astonished, hurt even, but she nevertheless forgave. Edloe was so good, and she could not expect to rise above the "prejudices" of her castle. Alice, in her mother's world, had been taught to scorn these "prejudices" and, as her ideas were still crude and confused, she classed many things under that category. She often shocked Aunt Louise by the excessive indulgence she entertained for certain liberties of speech and conduct, but in Edloe's presence she instinctively concealed her imperfect knowledge of the world, feeling that her elder sister was more of a "society woman," in the true sense of the word than she was herself.

Most of the guests to Mme. D'Arcy's dinner were at the picnic. Many young girls were accompanied by their mothers; among these were, two gay and somewhat giddy American girls, who had rented an old manor near Cote-Boise and for whom Alice professed a great friendship.

The life of the party was Captain Stamer, who had driven over at full gallop. As he neared the rustic bridge, his exhausted and panting horse shied. Feeling that all eyes were upon him, the officer forced his rearing steed across the bridge several times, lashing and spurring him pitilessly, until the poor beast almost fell.

"Spare the poor beast, spare him, I beg of you!" cried Edloe, indignantly, "believe me, the spectacle is anything but an agreeable one, and you have sufficiently proven your horsemanship."

"I am at your orders, mademoiselle," he replied, gallantly. "But if you had command of a regiment, or the breaking in of a horse, you would be obliged to harden your tender heart."

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"I can, nevertheless, command obedience when occasion requires," she said simply.

"I am the proof of that," retorted the handsome Captain, bowing with an ironical smile.

And he immediately began to make himself useful, offering his services to all, laughing gaily, and bustling about. Alice gazed at him with evident satisfaction. That day, the equilibrium she so skillfully maintained among her admirers—and all the young men she met were naturally classed under this category—was a little disturbed in favor of the young officer.

The latter, moreover, made no attempt to conceal his admiration; he boldly, almost brutally, devoured her with his eyes. She wore a simple light blue dress, that became her blonde beauty wonderfully. She made a great pretense of being busy, rolling her sleeves to the elbow, and pinning her skirts just high enough to display the daintiest little foot imaginable, while the other girls opened enormous baskets sent on before.

Alice offered to fill the water bottles at the spring, Captain Stamer agreeing to carry them back when once filled. To do this, she must stand on the stones placed there to facilitate, and lean over. How could she refuse the willing hand stretched to assist her! In fact, she had no choice. And how pretty she looked, half kneeling, holding the bottle in her right hand, while the Captain firmly clasped the other. He bent over also and, for an instant, the limpid water reflected the two faces together.

"See, Mademoiselle Alice," he whispered, trembling with emotion, "the spring unites us. It is the divinity of the place, and the will of the gods is sacred."

"It is nothing but water," laughed Alice, not in

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the least shocked, "and poets say that the billows are perfidious."

"Let me tell you that I adore you!" said the young man, earnestly; "you are driving me mad. I have loved you since the first day I saw you."

"What, in that horrid railway compartment!" interrupted Alice. "The shrill whistles, the five-minute stops, and the dirty, ill-smelling smoke, are not poetic accessories, you must admit."

"You are laughing at me! But I shall go on repeating that I adore you until you are forced to believe it."

"But I do believe it."

"Ah! and it displeases you?"

"Not at all. It amuses me."

The young officer gave such a start that Alice almost lost her equilibrium; and this equilibrium was of more importance than even the other.

"Be careful!" she cried. "The bottle was nearly full; now I shall have to start over again."

"So much the better."

"Alice!" called her sister, "be careful, or you will take a disagreeable bath. Besides, you must hurry, we are waiting to begin."

"I am coming! This is my last bottle."

"Will you allow me to speak to you in private after breakfast, where no one can disturb us?" asked the lover.

Alice made no reply, but gave him a smile and a glance that fully satisfied the gallant Captain.

This little scene, which scarcely lasted five minutes, had been observed by other eyes as vigilant as those of the elder sister. While assisting Agatha St. Store in unpacking a monstrous ham and a delicious paté, Myron had watched the Captain's attitude and Alice's coqueties.

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"Do you know, Monsieur D'Arcy, that you are answering me at random?" said Agatha. "I asked you where we should put the pate, and you replied, 'In the water.'"

"I thought you spoke of the champagne, mademoiselle."

"You see very well——"

"That you have turned my head."

"I? Oh, no, it is not I."

And the American girl glanced mischievously at Alice, who was returning from the spring with a bottle in her hand, while Myron flushed furiously, angry with himself for his weakness.

Then they believed him in love with Alice? He? Why, he was engaged, or as good as engaged, to Edloe. Once more he regretted that the engagement should have been kept secret. He was on the point of telling all on the spot, but he dared not. Edloe desired her liberty for herself as well as for him; and in fact, that calm personage seemed far from being in love or jealous. No doubt, she would soon inform him, in that cold, gentle voice of hers, that he was free; that she could not be his wife. At this thought he was filled with a violent emotion, an emotion that strongly resembled joy. Yet, he had desired this marriage, and, without feeling a veritable passion for his childhood friend, he had felt attracted toward her, had done full justice to the qualities of her heart and mind. Then?

But he dismissed the subject; he would be happy for a few hours, if it was possible.

The Captain had found a place for Alice opposite her sister, but Myron was ever watchful.

"Mademoiselle Alice," he said, "Edloe has reserved one end of her throne for you. Come, you will form an adorable group together, and we shall be your

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subjects." Alice arose at once. A throne, whether made of the roots of a tree, or of gilded wood and velvet, was hers by right. With a merry laugh, she glided among the groups, leaped lightly over an enormous basket, and landed beside her sister. Throwing one arm around Edloe's waist, she nestled closely at her side. She instinctively knew that she never appeared to better advantage than when her laughing, mischievous face rested against the regular but pale and serious features of the young Chatelaine. Alice was always more prodigal with her caresses in the presence of witnesses, and beside her Edloe seemed almost cold, reserving her caresses for the privacy of their home.

When Myron arose to get the champagne, which was on ice at some distance from the table, the Captain followed him, and said, angrily:

"You offered her that seat beside her sister to take her away from me!"

"It is quite possible," replied Myron, calmly. "Here, take this bottle, I shall take charge of the rest."

"You take charge of a great many things, even of some that do not concern you. You are jealous of me, furiously jealous!"

"See here, my friend, this is no place to make a scene, we are observed. I introduced you to those young girls, and I am, in a measure, responsible for your conduct. You forget that you are not in a garrison, and that in our world we do not court a woman with beating drums."

"As long as that style of courtship succeeds better than your languishing airs—but you are neither her father or brother, that I am aware."

"Enough, Stamer. Mlle. LaFaucher is almost a

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child and does not realize how much you compromise her."

"And you intend to warn her?"

"Yes, herself or her sister."

"We shall see about it."

They said no more, for the discussion was attracting attention.

"You must be preparing a duel," laughed Agatha Store, little guessing how near the truth she was.

"You have guessed it," replied Stamer. "It is to be a champagne duel. Myron pretends that his head is more solid than mine. The wagers!"

From that moment, the champagne seemed to produce its effect beforehand on the young officer, his contagious gaiety soon won the rest, with the exception of Edloe, who could not overcome a sense of uneasiness.

After breakfast, which was prolonged as much as possible, there was some discussion as to what was to be done. The indefatigable American girls proposed games, but it was decidedly too warm. The greater number sat in the shade of the tall trees, while a few of the young girls, among whom was Alice, wandered off in search of flowers and ferns. Myron, overcome by remorse, seated himself beside his fiancée, conversing tenderly and affectionately, and poor Edloe was happy for a moment, believing he was returning to her, that the momentary fascination had passed away. Suddenly she saw him start.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Do you see your sister over there with the rest of the young girls? Your eyes are better than mine."

"No, she is not there."

"And Stamer has disappeared, too. I should have suspected it."

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"Why? What has happened?" cried Edloe, anxiously.

"Edloe, it is all my fault. I introduced Stamer, because he was an old friend, and I could not help it; but I should have warned you. He is a violent, unscrupulous fellow, and not at all a suitable husband for your sister."

"Oh, Alice has no intention of becoming his wife, I assure you. She has carefully weighed the pros and cons, for, in spite of her giddy manners, she has a singularly well developed, practical sense of life. She will only marry advantageously. The Captain is only a military man, not wealthy, and the name is not high-sounding enough to tempt her."

"But he compromises her. I am sure her friends over there know she has given him a rendezvous, and are gossiping about her?"

"Let us go together," said Edloe, rising, "it will look more natural than if you went alone. They cannot be far."

They walked on in silence, for Edloe could not help thinking that Myron showed more irritation and nervousness than the occasion seemed to warrant.

While gathering flowers and ferns for all, Stamer had gradually enticed Alice from the rest under pretext of finding late violets. The forest was very thick and shady at this point, and the brook flowed with delicious coolness.

"But where are your violets?" she asked.

"Further on, where they alone will hear us," he replied.

"Then you have laid a trap for me?" said Alice, smiling and thoroughly composed.

"No, it is the rendezvous you have granted me."

"I have granted you nothing, Captain,"

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"You think not? Then your eyes have lied to me, that is all."

"What did my eyes tell you?"

"That you were willing to listen to me; that you knew I was foolishly in love with you, and that you were ready to share that folly——"

"Then they surely lied. I assure you, Captain, that I will never commit any folly, that I am a very sensible little girl."

"If you are a sensible little girl, then you are aware that the best thing you can do is to get married as soon as possible."

A cloud gathered on the girl's brow.

"Why, I am not eighteen."

"Why? I shall tell you why. Because you will not be happy long with your sister. Just now she plays the little mamma to perfection; you are a new doll of which she is very fond, but it will not last. You come from two worlds, not only different, but hostile. When you proposed a comedy the other day, Mlle. LaFaucher feared you would play it too well,—show that you were your mother's daughter."

Alice broke a branch with a snap and angrily plucked the leaves, but she remained silent.

"It is not much," went on the Captain, "but straws indicate which way the wind blows. Your sister spends eight or nine months of the year in the country, and you cannot expect her to make a change in her habits to please you, to take you out into the world where you would be welcomed as a queen while she would be neglected."

"You are pleading your own cause," observed the girl with a shade of sarcasm.

"Yes, for I love you. You must be my wife, mine forever. There is nothing I would not do to win

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you; if necessary, I would tear you away by force from this world so ill-suited to you."

"And from Myron D'Arcy," laughed Alice.

"Ah! you know that he loves you too—and it amuses you just as my love amuses you. Beware, Alice, I swear that I would kill you rather than see you the wife of another."

"Dramas are out of date, remember."

"On the stage rather than in life. Never has passion been the cause of more crimes than in our days—and I would not shrink from crime."

Until this moment, Alice had retained that disdainful calm of the Parisian girl, little inclined to the sentimental and brave withall. But she now began to fear this importunate lover, wondering if the numerous glasses of champagne he drank at breakfast were not the cause of his exaltation. She thought him simply frightful with his bloodshot eyes, his panting breath and flushed face; she no longer recognized her handsome Captain in this excited man.

"Monsieur Stamer," she said in a dignified tone, "you will have the kindness to take me back to my friends? You were wrong in enticing me so far away, and I was wrong in following you, but I never for an instant doubted that you were a man of honor."

"Give me a little hope, Alice," he pleaded. "Have pity on me, I swear that you must be my wife!"

Grasping her hands he covered them with passionate kisses. For the first time in her life, the girl was really frightened.

"Edloe! Edloe!" she called, her voice ringing clear and sharp.

"Here I am, my darling. I have been looking for you for the last twenty minutes," replied her sister's quiet voice.

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At the presence of Edloe, she immediately recovered her presence of mind.

"The Captain said there was a bank of violets in this direction," she exclaimed, "and we have circled around this thicket so many times that we did not know which way to get out. I shall go with sister now," she added to the young officer; "she knows the way better than you do."

The two sisters walked away arm in arm, while Myron gazed at his old friend in silence, resolved to demand an explanation.

"So I am indebted to you for this interruption, too!" exclaimed Stamer, his voice quivering with anger.

"Certainly," replied Myron, quietly.

"I want you to understand that I have had enough of your surveillance."

"You shall have to submit to it nevertheless, unless you remain at your home in the future."

"You would only be glad to rid yourself of a dangerous rival," sneered Stamer.

"You are entirely mistaken, I have no pretensions to Alice LaFaucher's hand."

The Captain burst into a forced, ironical laugh.

"And I know that you are madly in love. I know all the symptoms of that malady!" he said bitterly. "Well, no, my dear fellow, I will not be complaisant enough to leave the field to you. I will go to the chateau to-morrow, the next day, and every day, if it suits me."

"I shall find the means to prevent you," said Myron, beginning to lose his self command.

"Indeed, how so?"

"By requesting Mlle. LaFaucher to refuse you admittance."

"You dare not do that."

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"I will do it."

The two men glared at each other, their old antipathy of nature turned to hatred; and this hatred in Stamer became a sort of wild fury. He rushed at his rival, with murder in his eyes, but Myron was on the alert and repulsed him with such violence that the officer lost his equilibrium. The same threatened to become a pugilistic encounter, but Myron, who was vigorous in spite of his sedentary life, seized his adversary's hand, and said sternly:

"Have you lost your senses? We are only a few feet from all these people and they must have heard your angry words. We must not have that young girl's name mixed up in this quarrel. The affair, however, cannot stop here. You want a duel? Well, I am not averse to it myself. But we must find a plausible pretext. You have the reputation of being a sharp gambler. I shall meet you at the beach at the end of the week. We shall appear together on the beach at the hour of the promenade and act as comrades, as in the past. Later we can have a game of cards, and the quarrel will follow. Then we shall fight to the death. If you kill me, it will be one solution of the matter. But I warn you that if the advantage is on my side, I will not spare you. I shall kill you without mercy, for I hate you!"

"Your hatred cannot be more intense than mine! As to the results I have no fears. I am a skillful swordsman, while you scarcely know how to handle a sword; and as for the pistol, I hit the mark five times out of six."

Myron shrugged his shoulders. At that moment, he cared little for life. He had at last read his own heart. By the intensity of his hatred, he realized that he loved the sister of the woman to whom he was pledged, that he loved her madly, and was a traitor

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to his word. Edloe had offered him freedom, but he had refused to take it, and he was, therefore, faithless.

The Captain went straight to his horse, and galloped off without taking leave of the party of young girls grouped around the fountain, commenting anxiously on the quarrel they had partly overheard. Myron excused his friend's abrupt departure by pleading sudden indisposition. No one, however, was duped by his apology, and the day that had begun so gaily ended sadly and gloomily.

The whole party now started toward the road, where the carriages awaited them, Edloe, however, succeeded in falling behind the rest with Myron.

"What has happened?" she asked, eagerly.

"Why, nothing, my dear Edloe. Only I fear Stamer took that wager about champagne seriously. I remonstrated with him, and, for a moment, he lost his temper. But he is a sensible fellow after all, and understood that the best thing he could do was to go, and he went. That is all."

Edloe, not wishing to show that she doubted the story, remained silent, absorbed in reflection. She understood many things that day. She suffered intensely, and shut herself in that reserve way habitual to her, to hide her feelings.

"Myron," she said at last, "I wish to have some serious conversation with you. There will be a reception at the Stores Tuesday. I shall send Alice with my aunt, and find some excuse to remain at home myself. Meet me at the stone cross at half-past three. No one will disturb us there."

"I will be there, Edloe," he answered, gravely. His heart was also filled with sadness. The life which had appeared so sweet and beautiful before him now seemed to open lamentably gloomy.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKING OF THE ENGAGEMENT.

"You know, Edloe, that I should be delighted to stay with you," said Alice, sweetly, as she bent over her sister, "and you would see what an excellent nurse I am."

"Thank you, my darling; when I have these headaches, I must have quiet and solitude. Make my excuses to Mrs. Store and be sure to have a good time."

Alice looked at her sister's pale face compassionately. She was never ill, and Edloe's heavy eyelids made her appreciate her own pink cheeks and cherry lips. She lowered the curtains, gave a satisfied glance at her pretty figure in the mirror as she passed, and returned to her sister's side. "I wish I could be of some use to you," she said, kissing the pale cheek once more; "you are always so good to me."

Edloe smiled and dismissed her with a caution not to flirt with the Captain.

"Nor with Myron?" retorted the girl laughingly.

"Nor with Myron," repeated Edloe, gravely.

As soon as the carriage with her aunt and sister had rolled away, Edloe arose, bathed her face in cold water, and feverishly paced up and down the room. Then going to her boudoir, she took out her diary. She was really ill, having passed a sleepless night, but she felt that she must do something while awaiting the hour fixed to meet Myron, and she wrote rapidly, confiding her thoughts to her only confidant.

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"Tuesday, June 21—It is now only two; I have time to think, to question myself.

"What is going on within me? Why am I ill and sad—sad unto death?

"And yet it is all quite simple. When Mme. D'Arcy asked me to be her daughter, I imposed the condition that Myron and myself should be free. In an hour I shall tell him that we cannot marry, for he does not love me. I do not want to suffer the agony my poor mother suffered before me. I prefer to suffer now.

"This so much desired and wise marriage, in which all conditions seemed so favorable, for a time seemed acceptable to him. Then, in one instant, these hopes, so carefully planned, crumbled like a house of cards under the breath of a child. The passion which, alas! I could not inspire in him, has been inspired by another. He will not believe it; he struggles against it, but in vain. He will receive his liberty, his happiness from my hands. It is, nevertheless, very cruel, to think that Myron will never love me. The woman he adores is Alice, my sister.

"She captured his heart while toying with it, as she did with Captain Stamer's. Does she know the value of that heart? Ah! what a problem is life, and how blindly we grope in search of duty!

"After all, have I not also a right to happiness! Why sacrifice myself? Why not struggle? It may be but a passing fancy in Myron. He may one day reproach me for giving him up—I, who am capable of understanding, appreciating and loving him so tenderly—of having united him to a delicious, foolish, wordly child; he so learned, so full of noble thoughts and ambitious aspirations!

"My little Alice, my beloved child, if you knew; if you could suspect what thoughts struggle within

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me! Are you really what you seem? Do all those loving words and caresses come from your heart? Are you, like your mother, a skillful actress, who wins love only to better grasp all the joys of life! But what matters, since you possess the all-powerful charm, since you have only to appear to be adored? Since I, though doubting and suspicious, love you, and would weep night and day to spare you a tear, would accept perpetual sadness and despair to make you happy.

"It is time to go. No one shall see me, for the door of the turret opens almost into the forest. My heart throbs wildly. I am going to meet my fiancé, he who should be my husband!

"How sad I feel. Oh, my God, help me!

"4:30 P. M.—It is done. All is over—Myron is free. And it all took place very simply, as if by those few words I were not destroying my happiness forever. Passionate words and long phrases have nothing to do with the real crises in life.

"My poor head aches dismally, but I cannot rest. It is almost a relief to go over the scene by myself.

"I found Myron nervous and agitated; he met me with outstretched hands.

"'You have brought me here to fix the date of our wedding day, have you not, Edloe?' he asked.

"I feel sure that if I had said 'Yes,' he would have felt almost relieved; and for an instant I was tempted to utter 'Yes,' but remained silent.

"'You are not well, Edloe,' he added, concernedly; 'you are pale and nervous.'

"'I slept badly last night. But let us sit down, Myron, I have a great deal to say, and we are safe from interruption here.'

"It was warm and sultry, heavy, dark clouds overhung the sky, and notwithstanding the heat, a cold

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breath of wind made me shiver now and then. A storm was brewing, the ocean was gray,—a dull, melancholy gray.

“Instead of speaking, I gazed far out on the waters at the white crested billows that announced a rough sea, saying to myself, that when these white points should reach the shore, when these panting, hurrying waves should dash on the sands, I would say to him: ‘It is all over.’ I was cowardly, but also very weary—I almost lost my self-control. He took my hand gently, affectionately, and I felt that he was looking at me, and that he was trying to gaze into my eyes. I was still watching the white line of foaming waves that rolled nearer and nearer. The breaths of icy wind became more frequent.

“‘You are feverish, Edloe.’

“These words were so full of tenderness, of pity, that the tears gushed to my eyes. I was determined not to weep before him. I withdrew my hand from his clasp and said, calmly:

“‘It is nothing. Fever always accompanies a headache. But I did not come to speak of my health.’

“‘What can you wish to speak of, if not of our approaching marriage?’ he said, tenderly.

“It seemed to me that I would not have the courage to tell him what I had come to say, unless I did so at once. And it was in a voice that sounded strangely to my ears that I replied quickly:

“‘That marriage, Myron, shall never take place. I cannot be your wife.’

“A dead silence followed, and I could hear his hurried breathing.

“‘Why?’ he asked, coldly, almost harshly.

“‘Because I was not made to marry. Because I love solitude and liberty, and in spite of the affection

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I feel for you, I could not entrust that liberty into your hands!

“‘It is not that. Look at me straight in the eyes, Edloe. You have never lied! There is something else. What is it?’

“Then, without knowing what I was saying, I cried out:

“‘Have pity on me, Myron. I am suffering. I suffer for you, for myself, for the pain I shall inflict on your mother. Do you not see that if I could conscientiously be your wife, I would say: “Take me, I am yours for life”? But I cannot, I assure you, I cannot.’

“‘You must have thought of all these things before our engagement, for I still persist in calling it an engagement. If you have changed your mind since, you must have a reason—and I want to know it.’

“It seemed to me—I may have been wrong—that he insisted only to acquit his own conscience, and because he was convinced that I would not yield. What would happen if I yielded? This thought brought back my self-possession.

“‘Remember our agreement,’ I said. ‘This marriage was to take place only if our love became closer and more intense with time. But we are now further from each other than we were six years ago. This reason appears sufficient. We love, yes, but as intimate friends, or brother and sister. That may suffice you, but to me it is not enough. I would be unhappy without contributing to your happiness. It is better to suffer a little now—and I will admit Myron, that I am doing this only after a great struggle—than to live together for years without ever being really united. During this time of probation our love has decreased instead of augmenting. What would it be if we were bound forever? Believe me,

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Myron, it is for the best. Let us part good friends, without bitterness, without recriminations. Later, you will admit that I was right.'

"And thus I pleaded against myself, and little by little he allowed himself to be persuaded, for his heart pleaded with me. In a very short time his emotion vanished. I had lifted a great weight from his heart—or, from his conscience, rather—and he was infinitely grateful to me. He, however, continued to protest for appearance's sake. I felt it; and he soon perceived it. I had used only vague formula's to explain my change of sentiments, yet he was satisfied. But he has a noble and tender nature, and he must have understood that, notwithstanding my impassibility, I was suffering.

"'You speak of friendship, Edloe,' he said. 'How much tenderness, affection and admiration enter into this friendship! I have known you from childhood, and have always found you true and brave; of a goodness almost too perfect, always forgetting yourself to think of others. Notwithstanding your serenity, I know that you are capable of profound enthusiasms, sublime heroisms; and, in spite of all, you have retained an adorable simplicity and naïvete. Alas! it is romance that stands between us now. You want the ideal, the impossible. In this life we must content ourselves with mingled sentiments, incomplete, yet very acceptable happiness. I assure you, there are many men and women in the world who would be satisfied with a marriage such as ours might be.'

"His voice, which at first had been bitter, was now gentle and caressing. The crisis had passed. He now only felt the relief that succeeds unpleasant emotion."

"And I? Ah! well, I still watched the threaten-

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ing white-crested waves, so close now, and vaguely pitied the golden sands that would soon be lashed by the furious gale. The wind drove the heavy, dark clouds over the sky. Suddenly, a vivid streak of lightning rent the heavens, and the thunder burst like a cannon shot. We both sprang to our feet.

“‘Hurry home, Edloe; you will just have time before the rain,’ said Myron.

“‘Good-by, Myron,’ I murmured.

“He was much agitated. I believe I was on the point of fainting, but my sole thought was to keep my self-control and not cry out: ‘It is not true—you are blind and will not see. I love you; I love you, as no other woman shall ever love you!’ But I was silent. Then he bent over me and said, in a tremulous voice:

“‘Since we are truly parting, let me kiss you, Edloe, my dear, dear sister.’

“I raised my pale cheeks to his lips, and shivered from head to foot as I felt the kiss. He thought I shivered with cold, and said:

“‘Now go quickly. The storm is ready to burst.’

“While I write, the thunder roars with fury, the rain pours in torrents. That fury of the elements pleases me, it accords with my feelings. Besides, I shall be longer alone. Aunt Louise is afraid of the storm and will not venture out until it is over.

“My God! my God! how I suffer; how unhappy I am; how I wish to die! He called me ‘sister.’ Was it simply a common-place word of affection, or was it said with a particular intention? Am I destined to become his sister later? Alas!

“I have watched the hands of my clock for more than an hour, gazing in a sort of stupor. The storm is over. I shall return to my lounging-chair. Alice will find me as she left me; I shall have slept,

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dreamed. What sad slumber! What a lugubrious dream!"

Alice tip-toed into the room, fearing to awaken her sister, who did not move. As she was softly walking away, however, Edloe turned and said, gently:

"Is it you, darling?"

"There! I disturbed you," she said, with a pout. "I am always doing something bad. My best intentions are always followed by the most deplorable results."

"You did not disturb me, I was only half asleep. Did you have a good time?"

"Not very. To begin with, that storm made me nervous; and then quite a number failed to keep their word and did not come. The men especially were 'conspicuous by their absence,' so your wise recommendations were superfluous. The captain was afraid of a few drops of rain, although at the rate he rides that horse it would take him scarcely a half-hour to come. Besides he had promised me to be there. It will do your heart good to see how coldly I shall receive him the next time he calls. As to Myron d'Arcy, there is no excuse, for he is a neighbor. Dorris assured me he would come, but he did not."

"So your pretty toilette was a pure loss, my poor child!"

"Oh, you may laugh at your little sister. It at least shows that your horrid headache is improving. My dress was not a total loss, however, for I subjugated the few that were there. But, after all, it was a poor harvest."

"Alice, Alice!! When will you learn to look at life otherwise than as an immense field of pleasure?"

"Oh, some day. When I am married."

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"Then you will stop being a coquette?"

Alice reflected for a moment, then, kneeling beside her sister, replied gravely: "My dear Edloe, there is coquetry and coquetry. I believe I shall always be greedy of admiration. That is not forbidden, is it? But I share Dorris Store's opinion, one should amuse herself while a girl, and that means to be courted. Then once married,—will be married for good."

"That is, you will think of your husband and only have but one object in life—that is, to make him happy and be entirely devoted to him."

"Yes, something like that. Now, my dear Edloe, you are romantic and have exalted, lofty ideas, while I, in spite of my giddy manners, am much more calm and practical. But I am serious now. When I marry, I am sure I shall make a good wife. Are you satisfied now?"

"My dear little Alice, my dear little sister, if you knew how I loved you," sobbed Edloe, unable to sustain her tears.

"There, you are weeping now. It must be the horrible storm or that wretched headache coming on again. Sleep now, I shall stop my talking to you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MURDER.

The rain poured without ceasing all night and the greater part of the next day. The graveled paths were turned into torrents, the roads submerged; nothing was heard but the howling wind, the beating rain against the windows, and the rustling leaves on the branches bowed beneath the gale. The beautiful, bright summer had suddenly turned to gloom and sadness.

Alice paced up and down the drawing-room, dimly lighted by its narrow windows, chafing at being forcibly confined within, and deprived of all the pleasures that make the country endurable. For a while she helped Aunt Louise to assort the delicate shades of silk, while chattering, without awaiting answers; then she took up a book that immediately bored her, and finally welcomed the announcement of breakfast with delight.

Edloe was still suffering, but had made an effort to come down, and allowed her sister to pet her and play nurse with as much earnestness as she ever played at anything.

After breakfast, Aunt Louise installed herself behind her frame at the window, as usual, while Edloe sank into a deep armchair, sad and silent. The tranquillity of her surroundings became unendurable to Alice. She resumed her pacing up and down the room, impatiently watching the progress of the hours.

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"I assure you this is nothing at all, Alice," observed Aunt Louise, teasingly. "Wait till autumn and winter, when you dare not poke your nose out, when the postman can scarcely reach us, and provisions threaten to run short; when we almost freeze to death in this beautiful chateau."

"Don't calumniate our chateau, aunt," interrupted Edloe, shaking off the painful reverie into which she had fallen. "We can keep ourselves very warm and comfortable, and we have plenty of books, papers and periodicals to amuse us during the long evenings, Are you cold, Alice?"

Alice shivered under her pretty white shawl and made an affirmative sigh. Edloe immediately touched the bell, and soon a roaring fire blazed in the enormous chimney, brightening up the old room with its light. Notwithstanding the hour, it was quite dark, and Mme. Vaudery abandoned her work to seat herself near the fireplace, while Alice, radiant and smiling, once more installed herself in a pile of cushions at her sister's feet, and extended her hands to the fire.

"This is comfortable, at least," she cried. "The cheerful fire inspires conversation. I love so to chatter, and you are both so silent and grave that it gives me the blues!"

"Well, my little chatterbox," laughed Edloe, "we ask nothing better than to listen to you; is it not so, aunt?"

"Yes, on condition that she talks nonsense;—there is nothing so amusing in others," retorted Aunt Louise.

"Then you shall be served to perfection," rejoined Alice, gaily.

"I must do you the justice to say you are good-natured, at least, Alice."

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"This cheerful blaze makes me amiable. I was getting cross, watching the dismal rain. A grate fire always makes me think of my childhood. Mamma always loved to see a blaze in the chimney, even in summer time; and I can still see myself crouching in a corner while she dressed. I thought her so pretty, so very pretty."

Alice seldom made any allusion to her past, and Edloe had often felt curious to learn something of the childhood of this sister whom she had not known until she had found her blossoming into womanhood. She did not like to question her, and contented herself with the few words that escaped Alice, and gave her a glimpse of a somewhat strange existence for a child.

"I am sure she could not be as pretty as you, my darling," said Edloe, toying with a curl of her sister's golden hair.

"Oh! much prettier, with large, childish blue eyes; at thirty-seven she still played the ingenue, and could do it better than anybody, too. She had a way of saying a simple little word, without perceptibly raising her voice, that brought tears to everybody's eyes. I adored mamma, and she was very fond of me, when she had time; but she often forgot me entirely."

"What! forgot you? What do you mean?"

"Oh, she was not wicked, but she had so many friends, and went out so much, that she scarcely saw me. When she went out to a dinner, she often forgot to order dinner for me; and as the servants were frequently changed, they cared little for me. So I had to take care of myself, and dined on crackers and preserves, when I could find them. One day papa unexpectedly returned from a journey and found me greedily devouring a biscuit, perched on a cushion I had placed on a chair. When I heard his voice I was

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much frightened, and would have tumbled to the floor if he had not caught me. I cried bitterly, half from fright, half from hunger, and it was only by great effort that he succeeded in soothing me. 'Run for your hat, my little Alice,' he said, consolingly, 'and we shall dine together at the restaurant.' I was not quite sure of what that meant, but I did not hesitate. We had an excellent dinner and some wine that tickled my palate. I believe it was the happiest evening of my life. Papa was very amusing and affectionate, and once I caught him looking at me with tears in his eyes. That seemed strange to me, and I said, reproachfully, 'Why, papa, gentlemen never cry.' For the first time he then spoke of my sister, who would be a mother to me if ever I needed protection. After that I had a governess. I did not like her very much, but she at least saw that I had my dinner every day."

"All the same, it was a queer way of bringing up a child," sniffed Aunt Louise.

"I am afraid I am giving you a false impression of my existence in telling these things," she continued, "for I was much loved and petted by everybody, especially as I grew older. When I was fifteen, one of mamma's cousins, who was very fond of me, took me to the theater one day without telling anybody. She played the comic parts and made everybody laugh by her funny grimaces and gestures. It was very funny, but always the same thing. She took me to the green room, where many gentlemen came who said many witty things and were the first to laugh at their own remarks. I laughed, too, although I did not always understand. Then, one old gentleman told me that when I made my *début* I should create a sensation in Paris.

"'Leave that child alone,' said my cousin; 'she is

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Miss LaFaucher, and will never be an actress, for she is to be a rich heiress some day.' 'Then why do you bring her here?' retorted the gentleman. They all laughed at this and paid no more attention to me. But one of the gentlemen was a friend of my guardian, and the story came to mamma's ears, and I was sent away to school. You see that I was spoilt and neglected in turn; a queer way of bringing up a child, as Mme. Vaudery says. But it is only since I came here that I have known constant affection, kindness and devotion. You may judge how grateful I am, and how your little sister adores you, Edloe."

"My dear little Alice, you will make me weep again."

"Ah! Indeed no. That would bring back that wretched headache again, and I want to see you strong, well and brave."

"Brave for both?" muttered Mme Vaudery, a little sarcastically, although thinking to herself that this child knew how to win all hearts to herself.

At this moment a servant announced that Monsieur le Comte wished to see "Mademoiselle" for a moment.

"Show him in here," replied Edloe.

"I scarcely dare to come in, Edloe," said the visitor, as he appeared on the threshold. "I am covered with mud, and wet from head to foot. What! a fire in June—what a good idea on such a day!"

"Come in, we shall warm and comfort you, Monsieur," observed Edloe. "But how came Addie to let you come on such a day as this? She is usually so prudent."

"I came out in spite of her and in spite of myself, too, for I might as well confess my little weaknesses. Duval's wife is very ill, and I have just come from

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there, and I said to myself: 'My little Edloe will send her some broth and wine.'"

"Come, Monsieur," said Mme Vaudery, with a toss of her head, "make a clear breast of it all. The thought of a good roast and some warm wine had something to do with your deviation to reach the chateau."

"Another of my weaknesses," he confessed with a laugh. "I am quite a gourmand, and Edloe is so skillful in preparing hot wine. To tell the truth, I am soaked through by this beating rain and I am ashamed to see my soutane smoking near the fire."

"And your shoulders are wet, too," cried Alice, throwing her white shawl over his shoulders.

"Mademoiselle Alice," he protested, "I beg of you—your pretty shawl—and besides, it is hardly a priestly garment—although I must admit it is comfortable!"

"Keep it on," pleaded Aunt Louise, "it becomes you very well, and it is as light as venial sin."

"Humph!" ejaculated the priest, "he who fears not venial sin shall easily fall into mortal sin."

"Since we are on such grave subjects," resumed Mme. Vaudery, gaily, "I should like to be enlightened on one point. You are good enough to admire my embroidery."

"Indeed, madame, you are a fairy. That cushion you sent me for my prie Dieu is a marvel; only it is too beautiful. I hardly dare kneel on it."

"Well, Monsieur Le Comte, I have a friend who is not very pious, I am afraid, who takes old church vestments and ornaments, cuts out the superb flowers and arabesque to appliqué them on satin or plush, and surround them with fantastic stitches—some-what similar to mine. Is that what you call a venial sin?"

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"Sacrilegious! Madame, sacrilegious! As to deciding whether a thing is a venial or a mortal sin, one must first reflect. But where do you find these old things you introduce into your magnificent portières and draperies?"

"Oh! I hunt up the bric-a-brac shops in Paris. They have magnificent brocades and silks that our grandmothers wore at court balls."

"What a place Paris is!" exclaimed the simple country priest, "one can find anything there."

Edloe interrupted the conversation, entering with the hot wine she had prepared with her own hands, and which steamed appetizingly.

"Let me send word to Addie that you dine with us," she said. "The rain is over, but the roads are frightful."

"My dear child, she would scold with a vengeance. Tears have no effect on the vivacity of that excellent woman; on the contrary, she has a flow of words that I often envy when I am delivering my Sunday sermon. She would reproach me for preferring the fare here to the cabbage soup and pudding she announced we should have for dinner. Besides, she is very inquisitive and I have promised to tell her all I should hear about the assassination of that very unfortunate young man."

"What assassination?" cried the three women together.

"What! you have not heard of it?"

"No, we have not."

"There, there! Early this morning, the body of a young officer was found in the forest near the turn of the path that leads to the Fontaine Georgie! His name was Stamer and he was killed by a pistol shot. The murder evidently took place yesterday afternoon for the young man left home at about two o'clock,

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and his horse was found later and brought back there. But did you know him?" exclaimed the priest, suddenly noticing the consternation his words had produced.

"Yes," replied Edloe, in tremulous tones, "he was a frequent visitor here, and was introduced by Myron d'Arcy."

"Oh, yes, Myron knew him. As soon as the body was found the authorities called on him as a friend of the victim. He was out, but came in before they left. He seemed greatly shocked, and I understand he had an engagement with his friend to meet him at the beach to-day or to-morrow, but on account of the storm had decided to postpone it. He gave them the address of the captain's brother, the only relative he knew of, and with whom the young officer had quarreled many years ago."

Alice sank back in a chair, white and trembling, murmuring:

"And I who expected him and was angry because he failed to keep his word."

"Is any one suspected?" asked Edloe.

"There are all sorts of rumors. The inquest may throw some light on the matter. The spot is a deserted one, and the body remained where it had fallen until this morning. The murderer had plenty of time to make his escape, after rifling the victim's pockets of all his money; but he was very careful to leave the watch and ring, as they might compromise him. He is far enough by this time, you may be sure. To think such a thing should happen in our quiet neighborhood! It will give it a bad reputation, and strangers will avoid it. But why did he not take the main road? Then, at least, he would have run no danger of being killed, and causing so much uneasiness to peaceable people like us."

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"The captain always professed the greatest scorn for ordinary roads," said Edloe, "and always took the shortest way. He was of a violent nature, and met a violent death. Poor young man!"

"Alas!" sighed the good priest. "A sudden death, without preparation, is a sad thing. They say death must have been instantaneous. The wretch, whoever he was, aimed well."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING BETWEEN ALICE AND MYRON IN THE GARDEN.

The disagreeable weather continued for two whole weeks, but Alice's good humor persisted in an astonishing manner. She embroidered under Mme. Vaudery's tuition, learned to play cards, and even read a little during those long, dismal, gloomy days.

Edloe, on the contrary, seemed to feel the influence of the weather. She was nervous and sometimes busied herself with household duties with feverish energy; then she would remain motionless for hours, making a pretense of reading, but never turning a page. Her affection for her sister, however, seemed to augment rather than diminish, and assumed a passionate character that struck her aunt particularly.

Notwithstanding their forced seclusion, rumors of the outside world reached them every day. The mysterious murder was the universal topic of conversation through the whole country. The inquest had brought no results. A few vagabonds had been arrested on suspicion, but were soon released for want of proofs. Everybody who had known the young officer was questioned, and the Misses La-Faucher had also been obliged to submit to a sort of examination. It was openly said that the unfortunate young man had been madly in love with the younger sister, and had declared that he would marry her in

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spite of all resistance. Edloe replied for her sister, who felt greatly humiliated to hear her coquetties publicly discussed, that Captain Stamer had visited them as a friend only; that if he had any intentions for the future he had made no declaration, and that, moreover, his visits at the chateau had been neither frequent nor prolonged enough to make them suppose he aspired to her sister's hand.

Myron d'Arcy, on his side, could furnish no information of importance. When interrogated, he seemed annoyed and ill at ease, and very much bored to find himself mixed up in this lugubrious affair. One of Mrs. Store's servants testified that as he was clearing the débris of the picnic breakfast, he had overheard angry words in a quarrel between the Baron d'Arcy and the captain. When Myron was questioned on the subject, he admitted that, in fact, there had been a slight altercation between himself and the murdered man, but it had been of so little moment that he had made an engagement to meet the captain at the beach on Friday or Saturday. An acquaintance of Stamer confirmed this, the captain having mentioned the fact to him. Moreover the young officer's violent temper was so well known that no one attached much importance to his angry words and the quarrel was believed to be of no consequence.

Then the inquest dragged on. The captain's brother claimed the body and took possession of his effects, and the papers soon ceased to speak of the affair. It seemed evident to all that some tramp had taken advantage of the absolute solitude of the spot to assassinate and rob the officer. The matter seemed destined to be quickly forgotten, as the victim had few friends and had lost his parents in his childhood. Mme. d'Arcy took advantage of a few hours' break in the storm to call at the chateau. She excused her

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son for his apparent neglect of his fair neighbors by saying he had resumed his work with great energy and rarely left his study. Edloe made no comment. Alice, who was hurt and astonished that he could live without seeing her, assumed an air of injured dignity that struck Mme. d'Arcy as strange. One would have thought she was the fiancée and had a right to complain of her son's behavior.

Suddenly the sky cleared and appeared more radiant than ever with its bright July sunshine bathing the rich green grass, ripening peaches, and swelling the still green grapes.

One morning, Alice took a fancy to enliven the austere drawing-room and went in search of the beautiful sorb branches, the panish furze that gilded the slope of the hillock, the tall ferns and pretty digitalis that grew so abundantly in the park. She felt very gay and happy on that day, without knowing precisely why, simply perhaps because it was so good to live under a blue sky and breathe the fresh odors of the verdure, still wet with the rain and glistening in the bright sunshine. With skirts tucked up and an enormous straw hat, she walked on rapidly, scissors in hand, looking for the brightest and most dazzling sorb branches, and singing gaily at the top of her voice. Edloe possessed no voice and the classical music she played bored this little Parisian immensely. The elder sister, on the contrary, listened to Alice's songs in delight, although her repertoire was not very choice, and most of the songs had been learned from the cousin who played the comic parts at the theater. These made Aunt Louise laugh heartily, while the shocked Edloe stopped the bold little singer by placing her hand over her lips.

But on this bright sunshiny morning it was not a concert hall refrain that floated on the pure air; it

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was one of Mireille's sweet romances that Alice particularly loved. Suddenly she felt that a pair of eyes gazed intently at her; she stopped short, and turned quickly. Myron d'Arcy was standing motionless in the path, listening and looking at her admiringly. She blushed to the roots of her hair, annoyed to be caught in morning negligée, with her skirts turned up and disordered hair.

"It is not fair to surprise people like this," she said, with a little pout that soon changed into a smile.

"Why not? Because it is not the regulation visiting hour?" he replied. "But you must remember that we are in the country and not in Paris. My fair neighbor Edloe was never angry with me when I surprised her in a morning dress. But, then, Edloe is not a coquette."

"That is her gravest fault," declared Alice, as she clipped the branches right and left.

"Upon my word! I believe you are right. Simple and sincere women are rarely appreciated as they should be," he said, with a bitterness and passion that astonished the young girl. Then he added, more calmly: "Allow me to assist you. You look determined to cut down the whole forest, and it is hard work for your little hands."

"I have been waiting for you to offer your services," she observed, laughingly, as she filled his arms with her harvest.

"Have you got enough?"

"Yes, I am going back now. We can pluck a few wild pinks on our way; it will vary the color of my bouquets, and besides, I don't think you are loaded enough."

"Thank you. Do you impose this hard labor on

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me by way of expiation? What crime am I guilty of?"

"You know your crime well!" she said, somewhat curtly.

"Indeed, I assure you, I do not understand you," he said, bewildered.

"Is it not a crime to keep one waiting in vain? Is it not a crime not to have begged humbly for pardon at once? Do you know that you have not honored us with a visit for almost two weeks?"

His smile vanished, for a moment he seemed sad and preoccupied. Finally he said, with an effort:

"I was unavoidably prevented from attending Mrs. Store's reception. Since then, I have been occupied by that sad affair. Besides," and he lowered his voice, "I believed Stamer's tragic death would be a great shock to you. But when I heard you singing a moment ago, I was completely reassured."

Alice detected a something in Myron's voice that was almost a reproach. Her face flushed hotly and she stopped abruptly.

"Let us have an immediate explanation, Monsieur d'Arcy," she said, earnestly. "If I understand you, you reproach me with a want of feeling for a sad event that should concern me?"

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle, but Stamer was madly in love with you—and it seemed to me—at least I thought—that this love was not indifferent to you—"

"In other words," she interrupted, "you believed me in love with this handsome captain, and expected me to marry him."

"So I feared——"

"I had no such thought. Ah! I know that you blame me. Your allusion to coquettish women was directed against me, it requires no shrewdness to guess it. I will explain myself at once for all. It

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is very true, I love admiration. When the gardener drops his rake to look after me, it pleases me. Captain Stamer's attentions were by no means disagreeable to me, I admit it. But I never dreamed I inspired the passion you speak of. I pleased him, and he may have counted on a marriage that would have been more advantageous to him than to me. When I realized that things were going too far and that the captain was becoming a violent caprice, I came to a sudden determination: I resolved to ask my sister to receive him no more. I had no occasion, however, to carry out my good intentions, as you know. The unfortunate young man's death gave me a shock, mingled with a little pity and horror, but that was all."

A silence followed. Myron breathed more freely. He walked on by her side radiant and with head erect. Struck by the change, Alice, as if in spite of herself suddenly cried,

"So you—you were jealous then?" Then, blushing and confused, she looked intently at the tips of her dainty slippers.

"Yes," he murmured, "yes, I was jealous. Absurd, was it not? What right had I to be jealous? Do I know? Do I ever dare ask myself. All I know is that I suffered, that I passed through an abominable crisis, during which the whole world was indifferent to me, save a vision that I strove to drive away, and which unceasingly returned."

During this voluntary seclusion of two weeks it seemed to Myron that he had lived an eternity. He had struggled, accusing himself of folly, of disloyalty; he had tried in vain to forget the enchantress. The more Edloe seemed fitted for the wife of a serious man, who loved solitude and isolation, the more Alice seemed to claim luxury, society and all

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the things he detested. But all this was of no avail; he was the victim of that folly which sooner or later overtakes the studious man, who has spent his youth in the midst of books, instead of in the society of women. Only one thing was clear to him: Alice was adorable, and he loved her wildly. And in the whirlwind of his senseless passion, the sweet image of Edloe was nothing but a distant vision, almost effaced, importunate even. During those long, solitary days, while he struggled against himself, his passion had probably made more progress than if he had lived his normal life.

They walked on in silence. Alice still seemed to be listening in raptures to the voice which had ceased to vibrate. At last, very softly, as if it were but a sigh, she murmured: "What happiness!"

Myron dropped his load of flowers, caught her hands and forced her to look at him.

"Can it be true, can it be true! Did you say it was a happiness?" he cried, trembling with emotion.

"Yes," she whispered, almost inaudibly.

"My love does not offend you? Do I not frighten you, I, who am so little adapted to please women like you, to whom joy and perpetual happiness are as necessary as the sunshine to flowers. You do not know what a poor, aimless dreamer I am. It was only when I saw you that I first realized the joys of living. I feel that I am saying incoherent things to you. You must find me a sad lover. But it is impossible that you should love me, I have so little to offer you! You, who might be a duchess, a princess or anything you wished! Wherever you go, you shall be adored, for you were born to be a sovereign. Let me hear your voice. It seems to me I am dreaming. Speak, I beg of you!"

"I love you," she murmured.

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"It seems so incredible. Ah! I am so happy!"

"You pleased me the first few hours I saw you, and a few days later I made up my mind I should be your wife. How is it you did not guess it from the first? You did not even seem to understand. You paid more attention to Edloe than to me, although it is true that while you talked to her, you watched me. If I was a little coquettish with the poor captain, it was to make you jealous—you see that I don't try to make myself out better than I am."

"You are yourself. That suffices me. Who could be unreasonable enough to wish you otherwise?"

The past existed no longer for him. He forgot that he had once dreamed of a calm and tranquil happiness with the elder sister. What an empty future it would have been! After all, why should he feel any remorse? If he was free to marry this exquisite creature, it was because Edloe had willed it so. She had given him his freedom, and in such a manner that he could only bow to her wishes. Why should he mourn eternally over a union that he had accepted through motives of suitability, of duty almost? Had he not the right to happiness, to life, and had not Edloe herself given him that right?

From the window of her boudoir Edloe saw them coming toward the house. Myron, his arms laden with flowers, was bending over Alice, talking with animation, while Alice, the little chatterbox, was silent, her eyes fixed on the ground. Once she raised her pretty face and smiled at the young man, and there was an expression on it that Edloe had never seen.

The unhappy girl could not repress a moan, as she leaned out to obtain a better view of them.

"Already!" she said, bitterly. "Ah! I never believed I could suffer so cruelly."

CHAPTER X.

THE EVENT OF THE SEASON.

Edloe proved her courage; she showed herself stoical, smiling even. Moreover, in the noisy rejoicings of this engagement, which was the event of the season, the elder sister remained unnoticed, or she might have betrayed a little of the sadness that filled her heart.

She expected an explosion of regrets from her old friend Mme. d'Arcy, and some embarrassment in Myron; but love is such a selfish sentiment that it sees, and will see nothing but itself. It seemed as if this denouement had been long expected and was inevitable. All that preceded this was forgotten, relegated among the things of the past, a dead past, which everybody was anxious to forget.

As to Mme. d'Arcy, though she loved Edloe very much, she naturally considered her son's happiness pre-eminent. This happiness now depended on a union other than she had desired; she sighed over her vanished dream, and smiled at the dawning love. From her early girlhood, Edloe had always shown an aversion for marriage, and although she had once dreamed of overcoming this repugnance, that time was past. Evidently she was destined to celibacy, and Myron was not the man to woo a woman against her will.

Besides, it was time Myron should marry and Alice was quite as wealthy as her sister. She was

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a little young and giddy, perhaps, and her origin was not all it might be, but, after all, she was entirely separated from her mother's family. Time and the duties of matrimony would mature her character; nothing would remain of her exuberance but a little vivacity, of her coquetry, but a natural desire to please. This radiant creature would brighten her son's life, and Alice would be proud of her husband. She would aid him in his work, be ambitious for both. Myron was only a dreamer who worked for the mere pleasure of working. But a loving wife, who has a well-defined aim, can do a great deal toward the advancement of a husband.

Nevertheless, it was in a tone of gentle reproach that the baroness addressed Edloe shortly after the betrothal.

"Ah! Edloe," she sighed, "I had hoped otherwise. I cannot understand why you could not love Myron. As you see, all young girls do not disdain happiness as you do."

Edloe made no reply and Myron's mother immediately went into raptures over the perfection of that "ravishing little sister." She was in the mother-in-law's period of honeymoon, that which precedes marriage.

Mme. Vaudery expressed no surprise when the engagement was announced. She was well satisfied at the engagement, which would so soon make everything as it was before the arrival of the "intruder." In her delight she was all amiability, and prepared to offer some of her most exquisite embroideries as wedding gifts. One day, as she was consulting the prospective bride on the shade of the portieres for her boudoir, Alice said, mischievously:

"Your generosity is due to your delight over my departure, Aunt Louise. Since my engagement you

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have permitted me to call you so a little more and you shall consider me as a real niece. That will be on the day after my marriage, will it not!"

With her sister, Alice was even more affectionate and caressing than in the past. There was a difference, however. She was less dependent, less of a child near her; her dignity as a fiancée placed her on a level with Edloe. She talked seriously, almost with the dignity of a matron who has had experience in life and knows the practical side of things. After the first raptures, when she had become habituated to Myron's adoration, to his protestations of love, she began to busy herself with a thousand things, which in an analogous situation would have been entirely neglected by Edloe.

"You understand, Edloe," she said, "that for the last two years I have known just how my money has been invested. My guardian, who, though a very disagreeable man, is extremely honest, and insisted himself on explaining the situation to me. Myron and I will have an income of about a hundred thousand francs a year. One can live nicely on that. You see, he pleased me at once, and I skillfully led people to talk of him without arousing their suspicions. Thus I learned his methodical habits, the esteem everybody professes for him—and, as for the rest, your affection for him was sufficient guarantee. I had to look out for myself. In spite of your twenty-four years you are much more ignorant of the world than I am. I realized also that I must get married as soon as possible and have a home of my own. I know that you are an incomparable sister, but you might have tired of me."

"Never, never, Alice!" protested Edloe.

"How good you are to me, Edloe! Sometimes I

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am really almost ashamed of myself. But Aunt Louise is not of your opinion."

"Then," interrupted Edloe, astonished at this display of mercenary motives in that apparently frivolous nature, "you had planned and arranged it all beforehand? Why did you not speak of it?"

"Because—I don't know just why—I had a vague idea that this marriage would not please you. And, besides, I was not sure of Myron. Sometimes he seemed quite infatuated, then again he avoided me. I did not know what to make of it. Perhaps he was afraid I was too light-headed to be his wife. It must have been that, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," said Edloe, with an effort.

"But you know that I am really serious by nature."

"I begin to believe so."

"How funny you say that! Would you really wish me to be truly frivolous?"

"I do not know just what I do wish, my little Alice. But it seems to me that in the multiplicity of your calculations there remains but little room for that absolute tyrannical love. But—as you have approached me more than once—I am horribly romantic, old-fashioned, anything you please."

"You are mistaken, Edloe," observed Alice, with big, astonished eyes, "my calculations do not replace my love. I love Myron very much."

"Better love him without qualification."

"What a strange girl you are! Have no fear, my husband shall be happy."

Alice had also other preoccupations besides her plans for married life. Her trousseau was the subject of grave thoughts. She made a short trip to Paris with her future mother-in-law, saw the dress-makers, ordered toilets of all kinds, which the premiere of the house was to finish at the chateau. This

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interested her even more than the visit to her guardian, who for the first time in his life showed himself amiable and obliging, so delighted was he to remit his responsibilities into the hands of a husband. He expressed his regrets at being unable to attend the wedding, and his excuses were accepted without comment. All they asked was his authorization to the union and an account of his guardianship, which he gave without delay.

Then they visited apartments, the most enchanting little houses, but Alice would decide nothing before her marriage, as they would spend the greater part of the winter in Italy, but she wanted to see and have time for reflection.

Mme. d'Arcy returned from the expedition completely worn out, but still delighted with her future daughter-in-law; convinced that, in spite of her naïve airs, she was very practical and knew full well what she wanted.

In the surrounding chateaux, this marriage which was to take place in September, was an inexhaustible subject of conversation. A pretty village wedding, with the rejoicings given to the peasants, is so much more poetic than those great Parisian weddings.

The bridesmaids, under pretext of consulting the fiancée concerning their toilets, continually filled the chateau with the sound of their fresh young voices, the rustling of skirts and peals of merry laughter; and Myron found it almost impossible to obtain a tête-à-tête with Alice, who enjoyed all this bustle immensely.

In the midst of this confusion, Mme. Vaudery continued her pretty work undisturbed.

One day, under pretext of admiring the intricate

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embroidery, Pauline Store leaned over her shoulder and said, quickly:

"I must speak to you alone, Madame. There are too many people here; propose a walk in the garden."

Much perplexed by the serious expression on the girl's pretty face, Mme. Vaudery arose, saying:

"Yes, Miss Pauline, I love to imitate nature in my work. Come with me into the garden, and I shall show you the climbing rosebush that served me as model for this."

She drew the girl's arm within her own, and they left the drawing-room together.

"Well, what is it?" asked Aunt Louise, as they reached the garden.

"Something strange is going on," replied Pauline, "something you would be the last to hear. I thought it my duty to warn you, but really don't know how to begin."

"In that case, the best way is to go straight to the point."

"My mother was much annoyed by our servant's testimony at the inquest, and dismissed him, hoping he would leave the neighborhood. But he found work in a hotel and says openly that M. d'Arcy is Captain Stamer's murderer."

"How absurd!"

"Yes, but how can we put a stop to an accusation which is not formal? If we tried to intimidate this man he would claim that he was merely telling a story in which he was mixed up as a witness. What he merely mentioned at the inquest he now exaggerates and asserts. He speaks of threats, of the words "kill and without mercy," which were repeated more than once. A little more and he will swear that M. d'Arcy threatened to shoot his old friend like a dog."

It is the topic of conversation through the whole country."

"Bah! my child; don't trouble yourself about it. Myron was questioned at the time of the murder, and his answers were satisfactory. People will soon tire of the affair, and find some new topic of conversation."

"In the meantime, this gossip is going on. Ah! if M. d'Arcy had only attended our reception on that ill-fated Thursday!"

"He excused himself, did he not?"

"No, and as we teased Alice a great deal on the defection of her two admirers, that absence was the subject of conversation while Jackson served the tea in the garden."

"We must question Myron on the way he spent that afternoon. But, I repeat it, my dear Pauline, it is not worth the while to trouble your head about it. I assure you that none of those rumors have reached us."

"Naturally not; but I cannot say as much for the other houses and chateaux in the neighborhood. Many of our acquaintances, though they treat these rumors with contempt, assure us that the peasants believe this absurd story. Moreover, I overheard a few words yesterday that sum up the situation."

"What do you mean?"

"You remember, Madame, that when we went out riding in the afternoon, Alice and her fiancé took the lead. M. d'Arcy is madly in love and does not try to conceal it. This explosion of joy contrasts vividly with his gloomy and anxious state while the captain was also courting Alice. When we reached Riverview, a group of fishermen stopped to look at the fiancés, nudging each other and laughing. I was alone at the time and distinctly heard these words:

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'Hem! all the same, if one of us had done it he would have been thrown into prison in very short order. And look at him now doing his courting without being disturbed, and without any more thought of the one he sent to rot under the ground, than we would give to a tainted fish we throw back into the sea, and they call that justice and talk of a republic—' and another made a threatening gesture which he cut short when he saw me. This is why I determined to speak to you and ask you if we cannot silence these people by some means."

"We can do nothing. How can we force a whole population to be silent? In a few weeks the newly married couple will be far away, and then those calumnies will naturally cease."

"Let us hope so, Madame. But when I see Alice's happiness and think of the accusations that are made openly, it seems to me I again hear our gay laughter at the garden party, accompanied by the distant rumblings of the thunder."

"You are a charming girl, my dear Pauline. But I never thought your nationality so well gifted with imagination."

"That is another of your French prejudices," laughed Pauline. "You see in us only a nation of salt pork merchants, while we are, on the contrary, a refined race and lovers not only of luxury, but of art and poetry."

Alice, who had been watching them from the garden window, ran out into the garden and interrupted them.

"What are you quarreling about?" she asked, laughing.

"Mme. Vaudery will not believe in our artistic capacities, and I am indignant."

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"I should say so, my dear Pauline. Your eyes are full of tears, and you are quite agitated."

"Well, you know—when one touches on America—I get excited."

CHAPTER XI.

CONFIDING HER SECRETS TO HER DIARY.

The chateau now became almost uninhabitable—servants were kept running hither and thither, going to the city every day and returning loaded down with packages, which were quickly opened by Parisian dressmakers, whose pretty works invaded even the stately drawing-room, while Myron cried in dismay: “Why so much luxury, and what shall we do with thirty-five trunks?”

“That is my department,” laughed Alice. “Men know nothing about trousseaus. All they can do is acknowledge their absolute ignorance and moan in secret, if that is any relief.”

“I do moan,” sighed Myron.

“I said ‘in secret,’ ” retorted his fiancée, severely. There seemed to be no room for the mistress of the chateau. The lovers invaded the whole house and had no need of Edloe’s presence. Poor Edloe suffered in secret and none even noticed her, excepting Aunt Louise, who, from her corner, watched attentively, trying to guess the cause of her dear child’s sadness and silence in the midst of this joy and bustle. Alice was satisfied with the smiles of her sister without seeing that they were forced. Often Edloe glided out of the drawing-room unnoticed, and withdrew to the solitude of her boudoir or wandered feverishly through the avenues of the park.

Not daring to analyze the state of her poor suffer-

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ing heart, she made a few entries in her diary. One day she wrote the following:

"September 2.—In six days they will be married. They will leave at once, and then all will be over. I wish it were to be to-morrow. Shall I have courage to go to the end—without betraying myself—or will they read what I suffer on my pale, worn face? I examined myself in the mirror, and alas! how changed and old I have grown! I who always seemed younger than my age, now look more than thirty; and who cares or notices me? My good Aunt Louise is troubled! 'What is the matter, my little Edloe?' she asks. 'Nothing, dear Aunt,' I reply, 'a little tired, that is all. I am not used to these perpetual visits and all this bustle. When we are alone once more, as of old, I shall resume my old ways and good looks.' 'The fact is,' grumbles Aunt Louise, 'that delicious Alice invades the whole chateau. She looks as if she were the mistress of the house and kindly permitted us to sit at her table. Are you still in love with your sister?' 'I believe I love her more than ever,' I assure her, 'and want her to be happy, for her faults are on the surface only. If you knew how loving and caressing she is when we are alone in my boudoir.' 'Yes, when she has nothing better to do,' snuffles my aunt—but she was always unjust to Alice.

"I must admit, however, that she is invading. When I proposed inviting a few friends for the summer, she said, with a pout: 'Am I not enough?' I laughed and did not send my invitations. In fact, she is quite enough to fill the country with noise, gaiety and nonsense.

"While I write, sadly, oh! so sadly, the murmur of their voices comes to me. They are happy, deliciously happy. Myron completely forgets his works, his

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ambitions, his future! He loves and that love fills his life. And he thought he loved me! I still tremble to think that this other love,—the true love, might have come after our marriage. Then, all seems for the better; I do not complain, and face the long, solitary, melancholy years to come without terror. I never shall marry, for I could not love again since I have loved, since, alas!—I can say it here where no eyes shall ever see it—I still love! And more passionately than ever. All I ask is that no one shall ever suspect the truth!

“Outside of this mad love, there exists a curious state of uneasiness in Myron. He seems haunted by the fear that his happiness will escape him; and he wants to hurry the preparations, make the day nearer. There is something more than the natural impatience of a lover. He has more than once spoken of the malevolent curiosity which seems attached to him, and which he cannot understand. It may be the jealousy of the peasants, aroused by the luxury of this marriage, which is the event of the season. The fact is that, though much loved in the vicinity, I also feel something of that uneasiness of which Myron speaks. It is something undefinable, but I feel it acutely.

“Myron has still another reason for wishing a speedy departure, and for his anxiety to take his wife far from gossiping tongues. For many years he was considered as my future husband; and he fears that an echo of the truth may reach Alice, though assured that neither his mother nor myself would reveal it. Yet he trembles lest some word may escape us. This has become a veritable mania with him, and is increased by a curious sentiment; not shame, for he has always acted loyally, but something near it. What is most strange is that this half

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shame does not come of having broken off with me, but rather that he should ever have thought of marrying any one but his bewitching Alice.

"I felt that my face must betray my agony in the fitful firelight, and I also felt that Myron's eyes were fixed on me beseechingly. With an effort I brought a smile to my quivering lips, and said:

" 'I doubt very much if Myron was ever engaged. I know that, since his majority, his mother has been dreaming of finding an ideal wife for him. Had she found her, it is more than probable that I should have been the first informed of the fact, since we are such old friends.'

" 'But she must surely have thought of you?' "

"Ah, the cruel child!—How did I ever summon courage to answer calmly? How is it that I did not faint before their eyes? I seemed to hear the echo of my voice, far, far away as I again forced a smile to my lips, murmuring:

" 'It is very probable. But children brought up as brother and sister rarely marry.'

"Evidently satisfied, Alice arose to replace a log on the fire. Myron followed to assist her and furtively pressed my hand. I drew my chair back from the firelight, just then tea was brought in, and Myron abruptly changed the conversation, saying: 'Do you know that we are of interminable gossip in the neighborhood?'

" 'Wherever I go, people turn to stare at me, women stand on the threshold to follow me with their eyes.'

" 'Just what they do with us!' cried Alice. 'I did not think that the Normans were so curious.'

" 'It annoys me so,' continued Myron, 'that the other day I turned and asked a peasant why he gazed at me so curiously. "On account of your marriage,

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Monsieur," he replied, "they say it makes you very gay——" "Well," I asked, "does it make you sad when you marry?" "Ah! when we take a wife we don't make such a fuss as the rich people. Besides, you were mighty lucky that the captain should be killed just in time to leave you a free field." "His death grieved me very much," I said. The man turned away with a mocking laugh. Upon my word, for a moment I thought he would accuse me of being the murderer."

"Thad was just entering with the tray and, through awkwardness or agitation, I know not which, the cups rattled against each other and he could scarcely lay them on the table. When I asked him what was the matter, he replied quickly, "Nothing, Mademoiselle, nothing—a little dizziness, that is all, I am subject to it." He was very pale and clutched the furniture for support as he went out, the others, who had remarked nothing, continued their conversation around the fire-place. As Aunt Louise placed her embroidery aside to take up the cup of tea, I heard her ask, softly:

"Myron, why did you not attend Mrs. Store's reception on that Tuesday?"

"Yes!" cried Alice, "why did you not come?"

"Because I felt ill, jealous and cross," he replied.

"Tell us how you spent your time?" persisted Aunt Louise.

"Myron was visibly ill at ease and looked imploringly at me; but I could do nothing to help him.

"It is such a long time ago," he stammered, "how can I remember? I believe I wandered aimlessly through the forest, as I often do when in bad humor."

"And you jumped through the window," laughed Alice.

"Probably, I don't remember."

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"He arose and joined me at the table. I saw that his hand trembled and motioned him to sit down, while I carried the tea to my aunt, who, it seems to me, was looking at Myron in a queer way.

" 'What is it, Aunt?' I whispered.

" 'Nothing, my dear,' she replied. 'Only I regret that Myron should have so little memory. It must be inconvenient in his work as a historian.'

"If among the peasantry, the curiosity was excited by this approaching marriage—God alone knows why—our friends, on the contrary, seem disposed to rejoice over it. It is a new phase of the warfare between the hut and the chateau. We have accepted dinners and fêtes of all kinds for miles around. This has not been the least of my trials; I have been forced to look happy in the happiness of Alice; to endure from many a sort of an expressed pity which is terribly painful to me. I am brave enough, but if the effort were prolonged my courage would give way. There is a limit to human strength.

"As we had no near relative to walk with Alice to the altar, I asked an old friend and neighbor, the Marquis de Saint Bartram, to assume the rôle of father. Although old and retiring, he accepted immediately, and yesterday he gave a great dinner in honor of the fiancée, to which he invited all the titled celebrities of the neighborhood. Our name sounded very plebeian in the midst of those sonorous titles, but Alice's beauty threw all the other women in the shade. She naturally took precedence, not only in her quality of fiancée, but by right of conquest, through her grace and beauty. And how proud Myron seemed of her!

"The Marquis has always been very kind to me, treating me with a mixture of courtesy that savors of the *ancien régime*, and of paternal benevolence.

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He still remembers that he was a witness to my mother's marriage, and takes a great interest in me.

" 'Do you know, my dear Edloe,' he said, as he took a seat beside me after dinner, 'that I am particularly pleased that you should have addressed yourself to me on this occasion?'

" 'You have always been so kind to me, Marquis, that I have never hesitated to ask of you a service, even at the risk of imposing a task on you,' I replied.

" 'Offering your arm to a pretty girl can not be called a task; I should certainly have preferred to lead your mother's daughter to the altar, Edloe, and it sometimes seems to me that she reproaches me in spirit. But, let us say no more about it. You have adopted Alice as your sister, and it is in that quality alone that she is here. But this is not what I started to say. My name is old in this country and will impose silence on ill-disposed persons——'

" 'What ill-disposed persons?' I interrupted, 'What can any one have against us?'

" 'It seems to me that the Marquis got a little muddled in speaking of the gossip this marriage had caused, the criticism on the display of luxury, etc. As I looked at him in perplexity, trying to discover the real meaning of his confused words, he took me affectionately by the hand and abruptly changed the subject.

" 'And now, my dear child,' he resumed, 'let me speak to you as a father; I will not conceal from you that Mme. d'Arcy and myself often spoke together of her long-cherished dream of calling you her daughter. But you would not have it so, and for the moment she seems resigned——'

" 'More than resigned, Marquis; she gives Alice to her son and keeps me for herself. You see, I am

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a very agreeable country neighbor—for rainy weather.'

"In spite of myself I am afraid there was a tinge of bitterness in what I had intended to say in a bantering tone. It was with an effort that I stifled a sob, and my old friend shook his head sadly and a little perplexed.

"'There is a false ring to those words, Edloe,' he said gravely. 'Ah! I wish you would be frank and open-hearted as in the past! Listen to me, child, you must marry.'

"'Never!'

"'Yet a woman should marry——!'

"'That is what my aunt says; it is a social and patriotic duty. But I don't see the necessity; there are always enough who will make the sacrifice.'

"'I have an excellent match to propose.'

"'My dear Marquis, you must understand that if I will not have a husband I will still less accept a "match." If you knew how much I detest that word! You must resign yourself; I shall never marry. Call it want of courage, pessimism, anything you please—but it is insurmountable.'

"'Can it be—can it be—that you have already loved and suffered?'

"'Ah! I implore you, do not start that legend; there is already enough comment! If I want to be an old maid, it is my own business.'

"'In my days, when a young girl would not marry it was because she desired to enter a convent.'

"'I assure you,' I cried, earnestly, 'that if I felt called to enter a religious life, I would not hesitate a moment. Unfortunately, I have no such inclinations.'

"'Ah! what an indescribable torture are all these

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conversations, the pitying glances of people who half guessed the truth!

"How I wish the sacrifice were already consummated! Once Myron is my sister's husband—my real brother—all this storm will surely abate. I know myself. Until then, each beating of my poor, tortured heart is a passionate outburst. If he could guess that he is loved by two women—if he could guess that the one who loves him deeply, tenderly, wildly, is not the one, who, in ten days, shall be his wife!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAY OF THE WEDDING.

The little church, where Myron and Alice were to be married, was delightfully situated in a deep hollow traversed by a pretty rippling brook. The prosperous and coquettish village, composed principally of rich farms, nestled in the shadow of the chateau of Marquis de Saint Bartram, an imposing mass, gray and somewhat somber, standing in the midst of magnificent gardens.

The church, though so small and simple, was pure in form and graceful in proportions. Its portico even had pretensions to the Gothic. But its chief beauty lay in its adornment of ivy, which, little by little, had climbed over the whole edifice. Nowhere did the ivy seem more tenacious, more insolent, more flourishing in its prosperity than in this spot where the thousands of birds nestled in its verdure, and where the church itself resembled a vast nest well protected and sheltered.

The priest would not have touched this ivy for anything in the world; he was extremely proud of it and attached to it with a sort of superstition. The Lord had undertaken the decoration of this humble village church, and the Lord knew what he was doing. No church in the neighborhood could boast of anything like it.

On the morning of the great day, the good priest presided in person over the work of the sexton. **A**

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marriage such as this one was not an every day occurrence, and he must do honor to it. Loads of plants and flowers had been sent from the chateau for the decoration of the altars; and the curé, with his soutane tucked up, dissatisfied with the sexton's work, was distributing enormous bunches of flowers and tufts of verdure to the best of his ability.

"What a pity Edloe could not decorate the altar herself!" he said, regretfully. "Women—though so inferior in many things, have a veritable genius for arranging flowers."

This speech of unquestionable ecclesiastical gallantry was addressed to no one in particular, but rather expressed the embarrassment of the priest, who did not feel equal to the occasion. It was, however, overheard by Dame Addie, his somewhat tyrannical housekeeper, who looked down on her master with a shade of disdain.

"Bah! Monsieur le Comte," she said, severely. "The women you love to put back in their place, as you say, can take care of themselves. And where would you be yourself, I would like to know, if some one did not take care of you?"

"I did not mean to offend you, my good Addie," he apologized, "I was speaking to myself. Those flowers don't seem well arranged somehow or other, what do you think of them?"

"I say they will do well enough for the little attention they will attract. Besides, I have a vague presentiment that this fine marriage will not take place."

The priest trembled, nervously, and stumbled down the altar steps.

"You have heard something, Addie?" he asked, tremulously. "Is there anything new?"

"I don't know just what there is, but I am sure there is something. The baker has just returned

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from Riverview and says the whole village is aroused, that on the beach nothing is spoken of but—you know what.”

“I was in hopes that those abominable calumnies had died out a few weeks since. To think that we are powerless to stop those rumors that float in the air, as powerless as we are to stop the wind itself!”

“It is very queer that they suspect nothing at the chateau,” muttered Addie. “If I were in your place, Monsieur——”

“You would cast gloom and sorrow in the midst of their joy. No, I am sure those rumors will die out as they came. Why grieve innocent people? They feel that they are surrounded by some secret enmity, but do not guess the cause. Mme. Vaudery alone seems to know, and she is silent. I will be likewise.”

But the good man was anxious and ill at ease. He walked nervously to and fro, consulted the sky, a somewhat obscure sky, with a few patches of blue here and there, the calm sky of a September morning. He glanced toward the village, which seemed almost asleep, the peasants having mostly gone to the fields. Nothing, absolutely nothing, yet.

Then he tried to collect his uneasy thoughts. The sermon he had prepared beforehand only half pleased him. And he, also, like Edloe over there at the chateau, helping to dress the bride with her artistic hands, repeated to himself: “If only everything passes well! How I wish it were all over!”

Eleven was striking in the old steeple; the sun, piercing through the autumnal fog, shone brightly on the nuptial cortège that stopped at the church door with rare punctuality. The village no longer slept; the peasants had returned from the fields, the women and children jostled each other, and the old people

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stood on their thresholds, protecting their eyes with their bony hands to see better.

Marthe, the housekeeper, from the depths of her carriage, had noticed this unexpected crowd at the approach of the village—something of hostility—an ill-stifled murmur, scornful glances, had struck her. The painful numbness in which she had lived during the past few weeks, which made her act as if in a dream, was pierced by an inexpressible anguish. At that moment she understood, or rather suspected, that these people accused Myron of an abominable crime by which he had won Alice from a detested rival. This she saw in the malignant glances of the envious peasants.

“Look, Edloe, how the people love us!” exclaimed Mme. d’Arcy, who was not of an observing nature; “our families have relieved so much misery!”

This new anxiety had its good effect, however. For weeks Edloe had been asking herself how she would control her feelings at the supreme moment. By the light of her passion, she had discovered hidden recesses of her nature, capacities of violent, ferocious jealousy, of hatred almost, that frightened her. She felt like an abominable hypocrite when her friends lauded her devotion, her kindness, her generosity, her absolute forgetfulness of self. Her affection for Alice, which still survived, had gone through moments of rebellion, almost of aversion, as on that memorable Tuesday while the storm was gathering, the scorching atmosphere had been suddenly shaken by an icy breath. And sometimes her passion for Myron terribly resembled hatred. All this, however, she had succeeded in hiding under a sort of cold apathy. Would she succeed in hiding it until the end?

But now she was thinking more of the curious hos-

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tility of the peasants than of her personal agony. It seemed to her that she was still called upon to protect, to prove her courage and firmness. She had never been deaf to that cry, and would respond to it now. Her true nobility of nature had taken the ascendancy and would henceforth retain it.

Alice was by no means a pale, timid, trembling bride. She was radiant, with happiness, and this happiness gave extraordinary éclat to her beauty. The Marquis, with head erect, advanced to offer her his arm, and turned for an instant, before entering the church, to cast a haughty glance at the surging crowd. The crowd now appeared less hostile. Beauty is a sovereign before which all bow as if by instinct, and never had these peasants seen a creature as marvelously beautiful as this blonde bride with dark eyes, who smiled so radiantly at the life that opened before her. This vision had more influence than the Marquis' haughty glance.

The ceremony was short and very simple; the few words pronounced by the good curé came from the heart and went straight to the heart. All those who had succeeded in entering the church were softened. Edloe saw, or rather felt it. From the moment she had left home to the end of Mass she had feared, she knew not what, but something vague, menacing, something that had long been impending, that she had seen for the first time that morning.

But a few hours more and Myron and his bride would be far from these vile gossips' infamous accusations, which for want of ailment would die out and be forgotten. The desire to see Myron in safety, out of reach, was so strong within her that she almost forgot her pain; she forgot that this marriage was being consummated under her eyes, that Myron and Alice were exchanging vows that made them hus-

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band and wife, words that united them for life, until death, and she suffered much less than she had often suffered at the exchange of a glance between them, or a too-prolonged pressure of their hands.

Leaning on her husband's arm, Alice came out of the church radiant as joy itself, smiling on everybody, bowing right and left like a little queen, and the faces that turned toward her had lost their sneering, evil expression. A mother, holding a pretty baby in her arms, rubbed against the rich satin dress. Alice turned and the baby smiled at her, stretching out his little arms.

"You pretty baby!" exclaimed Alice. "I must kiss you. You will bring me good luck!"

A look of approval greeted this gracious caress which won her all mothers' hearts. The return to the chateau was effected without the display of the feeling of hostility, and in the midst of the gay laughter and bantering of the young people.

Edloe breathed more freely. It seemed to her that the battle was won.

The vast dining-room, in which the former proprietors had received their sovereigns, and which was now rarely used, had been opened and decorated for the occasion. In the center stood an enormous table resplendent with rare old plate, crystals and flowers. And yet, neither the dazzling decorations, the brilliant toilettes of the women, nor even the two bright fires in the vast chimney places succeeded in removing the gloom. A little of the humidity and obscurity of the old unused rooms produced a vague impression of sadness, and the laughter of the young girls echoed strangely in the immensity of this gloomy room.

Nevertheless, the breakfast dragged on,—and Edloe, as hostess, was forced to smile and do the

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honors; and, as the time passed on, her torture became unendurable. The bride and groom, seated side by side, often exchanged whispered words. Alice, a little paler than usual, smiled and seemed perfectly happy, while Myron saw and heard no one but her.

Finally the guests departed; farewells and good wishes filled the drawing-rooms with almost dizzying noise; Alice disappeared to change her satin dress for a traveling costume; in another quarter of an hour all would be over.

Edloe was taking leave of the Marquis, thanking him once more with effusion. As he was about to enter his carriage, he looked at her and said, concernedly:

"Promise to take care of yourself, my dear child, to rest, for you have need of it."

"Yes—I can rest—now," she murmured, with such a sad smile that the kind-hearted old man drew her suddenly toward him, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"You know, my little friend," he said, gravely, "that if you ever need me I am, and always will be, at your service."

Edloe thanked him with an inclination of the head, not daring to speak for fear of betraying herself.

Mme. d'Arcy and Aunt Louise now alone remained in the drawing-room. Edloe was hastening away for a few moments' respite before the departure of the bridal couple, when a servant announced that a gentleman wished to see Monsieur Le Baron d'Arcy.

"You will find him in the blue room, where I had his trunk placed," she said.

Then, thinking it must be a friend of Myron's who had come too late for the wedding, and was bringing his congratulations, she went toward the little parlor into which he had been shown. As he passed through

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the hall, Myron appeared at the top of the stairway.

"My brother-in-law will be here in a moment——" she began.

Something in the attitude of the young man who bowed respectfully before her, struck Edloe strangely. Without knowing why, she felt frightened. Myron now entered hurriedly, expecting to find a friend, but at the sight of the stranger he stopped and said coldly:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but do you not know that I have just been married and that I leave in a few minutes with my wife——"

The tone in which he said "my wife" rang out like a joyous boast. Edloe involuntarily shuddered. The stranger, somewhat embarrassed, drew himself up.

"Pardon me, Monsieur, I am aware of it," he said, gravely. "I came myself to—to ask you a few—questions—to avoid scandal as much as possible."

"A scandal?" he exclaimed, bewildered.

Edloe, pale and trembling, came nearer to him. She understood. The storm had burst.

The young man's only answer was to draw a carefully wrapped package from his pocket. Removing the paper, he exhibited a small revolver, a veritable jewel, but rusty and ruined.

"Do you recognize this, Monsieur?" he asked.

Myron took the weapon, examined it closely, and replied, calmly:

"Perfectly. It was a gift from my mother, and here are my initials. How does it come to be in your hands, and in that pretty state?"

"That revolver was found in the forest near the Fontaine de Georgia. It was brought to me by a man named Graham, to whom it was given by a peasant. It is in this pretty state because since July the 27th it has remained in the shrubbery, amidst the

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ivy that covers the ground in that spot. The shrubbery being half despoiled of its leaves, the shining metal attracted the eye of the passing peasant. It was found near the fork of the two paths where the body of Captain Stamer was discovered."

"How singular! Who could have stolen my revolver? I am at a loss to understand it."

He was so perplexed, so far from suspecting the truth, that the stranger became impatient.

"You do not seem to understand, Monsieur," he said, sternly, "I am a representative of the law, and I arrest you for murder."

Myron looked at him in stupefaction.

"Why, you must be mad!" he cried, in horror.

"Are you not aware that for over a month, since your betrothal to Miss LaFaucher, the whole country has been publicly accusing you of ridding yourself of a dangerous rival?"

"Ah! that was it. But you, Monsieur, you, a man of education, of our world, you know that such a thing is absurd, that there is no jury stupid enough to believe that I, Myron d'Arcy, would conceal myself in a forest and shoot a man whom I could challenge to a duel?"

"The jury might reply that the captain was a formidable antagonist, that duels with him were reported to be unfortunate affairs for the other fellow, that you were madly in love, and that mad men will do desperate things."

"Yes, but you, a man of honor, would not believe it possible. The truth is, that I did have a discussion with Stamer."

"And you threatened him! Unfortunately there were witnesses to that discussion."

"I challenged him, and we agreed to meet on the

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beach at the end of the week that Miss LaFaucher's name might not be mixed in the affair."

"I assure you, Monsieur, that I have but one desire, that is, to obtain a proof of your innocence—in which I am disposed to believe—that I may allow you to go. Where were you on that Tuesday when, it appears, Miss LaFaucher expected to meet you at a friend's house?"

"Where was I?" stammered Myron, evidently troubled, "I cannot tell you."

"That is unfortunate," said the man, drily.

Edloe laid her hand on Myron's arm. This simple gesture was full of gentle, yet powerful protection; it was the gesture of a woman who loves, and did not escape the eye of the procureur.

"What my brother-in-law cannot tell, Monsieur," she said, firmly, "I shall tell. At the hour Captain Stamer is supposed to have been murdered, Myron was in the park with me. We met there by previous engagement, as I had grave things to say to him."

As she spoke, she gazed straight at the procureur, and saw that he did not believe her.

"Did any one see you going there, Mademoiselle?" he asked, respectfully.

"Unless I am mistaken, no one saw me. I went out through the little door of the turret which opens almost into the park, and which I alone use. The servants rarely pass that way."

"It grieves me exceedingly to doubt you, Mademoiselle—but M. d'Arcy is a very old friend of yours, it is even said there was once a question of marriage between you. He is now your brother-in-law, and your affection for your sister is well known. You must see that, under these circumstances, your evidence needs corroboration. This is why I am forced to ask for a proof, however slight——"

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At this moment the vibrating, joyous voice of the bride was heard calling, "Myron! Myron!"

They looked at each other, dismayed at the thought of this joy which would soon be changed into despair. Alice, in a pretty travelling costume, rushed into the room, buttoning the last button of her gloves.

"Well, Monsieur," she cried, gaily, "must I run after you? One would think I was taking you away. But, tell me, do I look like a married woman in this bonnet?"

Then suddenly perceiving the stranger, she turned to him and said:

"I was told that a friend had come at the last moment. But, Monsieur, congratulations are always in season."

But her rapid, nervous babbling stopped abruptly. Instinctively she drew near her husband, who encircled her with his arm. It was no longer to her sister that she flew for aid and protection.

"There is something the matter," she said in alarm. "What is it? I have the right to know; I am not a child."

The officer stepped forward, and stood so as to conceal Edloe from her.

"I am sincerely grieved, madame, to disturb you at such a time," he said, "but it is indispensable that I should question M. d'Arcy concerning the murder committed last July."

"Oh, is that all," cried Alice, recovering from her vague terror. "Then you have found the assassin? How fortunate. I have a horror of these mysterious crimes. Well, I suppose Myron has answered your questions; let us go now. The carriage is waiting and we must not miss the train."

"Will you allow me to ask you a few questions?"

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"Yes, but I warn you I have little to tell."

"You expected to meet M. d'Arcy on that day at Mrs. Store's?"

"Yes, but he did not come."

"And your sister did not accompany you?"

"No, poor Edloe had a sick headache. I left her lying, well wrapped, on the couch. On my return I found her just as I had left her. She told me she had slept."

"You do not think she went out while you were gone?"

"Certainly not. She could hardly raise her head. When she has those spells she is perfectly helpless."

"And yet," said Edloe, in a low voice, "I went down into the park."

"Why did you not mention it?"

"I did not think of it," stammered Edloe.

The young bride looked from one to the other and her terror returned, she began to tremble.

"Myron, tell me—what is it?" she said, imploringly. "Why do we not go? We are married; we are going on our wedding trip, over there, where the sun is still warm. It is so cold here, I am shivering."

"Do not be alarmed, my darling," he said, tenderly. "There is some misunderstanding which will soon be cleared up. I shall be obliged to accompany this gentleman and explain certain facts relative to the murder."

"But, what are you thinking of?" she said, astounded. "It would be the most ridiculous thing in the world. You will answer those questions on our return."

Unmindful of the presence of two witnesses to this scene, she clasped her arms lovingly around her husband's neck, as if to keep possession of him and tear him from those who would part them.

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"Madame, I am truly sorry," broke in the officer, "but time presses. A revolver, bearing your husband's initials, and which he admits as being his, has been found near the spot where Captain Stamer was murdered."

Alice trembled a little more violently, but her arms did not release their hold.

"What does that prove?" she asked bravely. "Edloe and myself have seen how easily one could jump from the garden into Myron's room. Some criminal stole his revolver, it is evident. I don't suppose you mean to accuse Myron of such a crime?"

As no one answered, the truth flashed upon her and she uttered a piercing shriek. They were, then, taking Myron away as a prisoner. This was the dreamed-of wedding trip they were to take together through Italy, the land of lovers.

Myron gently disengaged the detaining arms of his young wife and turned to Edloe, saying imploringly:

"Take her, Edloe; take good care of my poor little wife."

For herself, for Edloe whose distressed looking face betrayed a thousand times more than the frightened face of the pretty young bride, he had not one word of consolation.

"You will explain to my mother and console her," he added, simply. "It will be a matter of a few days only. I am ready, Monsieur."

"But you shall not go, I will not let you," shrieked Alice, simply.

"It will be a matter of a few days only. I am ready, Monsieur."

Edloe was obliged to care for the girl bride who sank on the sofa in hysterics, console the distracted mother who would listen to no explanations, and for-

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get her own pain until some hours later, when she found leisure to withdraw to her own room, leaving her exhausted sister sleeping calmly like a child after a nervous crisis.

To save Myron she had acknowledged their rendezvous, which he even more than herself was anxious to keep a secret. And she had not been believed by the officer. She had never been doubted in her life.

Where would she find any one that had seen them in that retired place where she had met Myron, for the place was always solitary. Ah. how often when trying to do good, we commit imprudences more redoubtable—than crimes. If Myron had attended the reception on that day no one would have dreamed of suspecting him.

She paced nervously up and down the room, unable to rest, not even thinking of finding oblivion in sleep. Her eyes mechanically wandered to her secretary, and she remembered writing her sufferings in her diary.

Suddenly she stopped as if turned to marble and clutched a chair to keep from falling. The officer's words rang through her ears. A proof, however, was there, locked in her secretary.

Kneeling on her knees, she buried her face in her hands, repeating wildly: "No, no, my God. I cannot; I cannot."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE QUARREL BETWEEN THE SISTERS.

Silence and despair succeeded joy and happiness at the chateau. Alice's grief was a curious mixture of secret anger and nervous irritation, and she shut herself in her room, refusing to eat, talk or be comforted. Frightened at the idea of returning to her home alone, Mme. d'Arcy still remained there, unable to act or do anything but weep and pray. In the first hour of their trouble, Edloe had gone to her old friend, the Marquis, who received her with outstretched arms and eyes full of sympathy.

"Yes, my dear Marquis, I know you are sorry for us," she cried, sadly, "but we need something more than pity. You told me to come to you in my trouble, and I have come. We are nothing but helpless women, and you must come to our assistance. Act for us, defend poor Myron's honor! We must—I shall—save him!"

"Don't be alarmed, dear child. No jury would condemn him on mere village gossip and the finding of a pistol. If he were guilty, his first thought would have been to clean the revolver and replace it in its customary place."

"The case may be dismissed. But if the real criminal is not found in time, or"—here her voice faltered—"or if some irrefutable proof of his innocence is not produced, he will always remain under the ban of this monstrous accusation. Many people

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will shrug their shoulders, muttering, 'Who knows?' and this must not be. Myron must come out of this trial free from all suspicion. He has before him a beautiful life of useful work and happiness, and that life must not be saddened, wrecked, at its opening."

"I will leave for Paris in an hour," said the Marquis, looking at his watch. "I shall see a lawyer well versed in such matters, and shall obtain permission to allow Mme. d'Arcy and Alice to visit Myron. Is that what you wished me to do?"

"Yes. And above all, let all possible means be used to find the guilty man. I need not add that no expense should be spared."

"I will not conceal from you, Edloe, that I fear the preliminary examination will not throw much light on the matter. Researches were made at the time of the murder, but without result. The crime was not discovered until twenty-four hours after it was committed. Many ships sail every day not far from here. The murderer was well provided with money, since he robbed his victim, and we might as well search for a needle in a bundle of straw. No, my dear child, we must place our hopes in the skill of our lawyer and the irreproachable antecedents of your brother-in-law."

Edloe left the Marquis, who had barely time to catch the train. She had done all that she could, and all that remained now was to wait and impart some of her own courage to those who depended on her. Oh, if she could only act and forget, if only for an instant, the sacrifice she might be called upon to make!

She did not dare open her diary; she did not dare recall what she had written. She knew, however, that in the abandon of her absolute security she had related her struggles, her most sacred thoughts, her

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love, her sad love, which she had always concealed with so much care, and which, alas! was written there between two sobs. She, whose only aim had been to conceal her secret!

And this sad secret would become the prey of a public ever greedy for new sensations; would be laid bare to the curiosity of all. Alice would know the truth, and Myron would learn that she had loved him! No, no, it could not be! She could never consent to it. The soul had its modesty as well as the body, and she could not lay it bare, not even to save a beloved one.

But she tried to escape from these thoughts. The murderer would be found; no money would be spared to discover him. Money spent lavishly sometimes achieved astonishing results. The Marquis had promised to see what could be done.

The affair attracted a great deal of attention. Not only because the accused belonged to an aristocratic family, a man already renowned for his works, but the circumstances of his arrest added much piquancy to the story.

The newspapers related the affair in their own way. It was known that the young wife was the daughter of an actress who had long been the delight of elegant Paris. Many anecdotes, more or less true, were turned into sensational articles. The victim's brother suddenly became an important personage. A portrait of him was reproduced, which bore but little resemblance, but which was, nevertheless, very pathetic, representing him as weeping over this younger brother, vowing vengeance and calling loudly for justice. M. Stamer ended by entering into the rôle with which he was invested, and persuading himself that this apathy was only feigned, and that he had suspected Myron at the inquest.

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Few newspapers were received at the chateau, and Edloe would like to have suppressed them all; but Alice, on the contrary, sent for them in quantity, read everything and worked herself into an indescribable state of rage.

Then, when the excitement over the matter had somewhat died out, while awaiting the trial, the silence seemed still more unbearable. She complained of not knowing what was going on, and, in spite of his zeal, accused the Marquis of accomplishing nothing.

And in this small circle, composed of four women—for Mme d'Arcy, though she announced her departure every day, still remained at the chateau—nothing was spoken of but the disaster. Friends had offered their services and sympathy; and by dint of talking and turning this sad story over, they finally became used to it, and no longer shrank from a glance, or the hearing of an awkward allusion, or a word of pity. Little by little, they resumed their old habits, while still awaiting the permission to visit the prisoner.

Then, one by one, the summer neighbors left for their city homes; the autumn came, cold and sad, and isolation began to be felt.

One day, not long after the arrest, Alice, who had been contemplating a piece of embroidery in silence, suddenly looked up and said:

"Edloe, I have never understood why you told the officer that you had gone down into the park on the day of the murder, when I left you so ill."

Edloe shuddered. She had long expected these words, but had finally come to the conclusion that in the violent emotion she had experienced, Alice had forgotten an incident which she could not understand. If called upon, however, she had decided to

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tell the truth, or at least a part of the truth, since it must be revealed some day.

"I did go down," she answered, gravely, after a moment of silence.

"What difference did it make to the officer whether you went or not?" insisted Alice.

Edloe had become so pale that the three women looked at her in consternation.

"Listen, Alice," she faltered, "I did not want to tell you of—this meeting—for I feared that you might misconstrue this simple action. Like all our friends, I had remarked Myron's significant attention toward you, and I wanted to question him. I felt as if I were entrusted with a sacred trust, and wanted to play the rôle of a loving mother. I had given a rendezvous to Myron in the park. At the time the crime was committed, we were both seated at the foot of the stone cross."

"Then—why did they arrest Myron since you said?"—stammered Alice, as she arose agitatedly.

"The officer did not believe my word, and you innocently confirmed him in the conviction that I had lied to save Myron."

"And you had lied!" she hissed, flushing angrily.

"I spoke the truth," replied Edloe, simply.

Unable to control her fury, indifferent to the wounds she inflicted, Alice cried violently:

"Then you are the cause of all my troubles! Ah! Don't speak to me of people who meddle in other people's affairs. I had no need of your aid. I always guarded my own bark alone. If you had minded your business, Myron would have met me at Mrs. Store's reception; he would have been seen there by all, and no one would think of accusing him of that murder. And I would not be unhappy in the

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ridiculous situation of being married and without a husband——”

“Alice!” protested Edloe, painfully.

“It is all true,” she continued, heedlessly. “When I was a child I was taken to see a play in which a marriage had been declared void, on account of I know not what. In the next act, the bride, still appeared in her white dress, but in the midst of the orange blossoms could be seen small green oranges, others almost ripe, and that made people laugh.”

“They took you to see pretty things.” muttered Aunt Louise.

“Well,” went on Alice, more and more excitedly, “every morning I search among my orange blossoms to find the little green oranges—that always put me into such a frenzy, that I put them in the fire yesterday. Here the servants call me Mademoiselle Alice more than half the time, the peasants stare at me and I repeat it—my position is ridiculous and unbearable!”

Once more, in the silence that followed this outburst, Aunt Louise’s voice was heard murmuring:

“This time the knot has broken the needle short.”

“My poor little Alice,” said Edloe, very gently, “when you recover your composure, you will regret your violence; you will realize that it is horribly cruel to have been the involuntary cause of a frightful scene—that it renders the days painful and the nights atrocious.”

“Oh! Edloe,” cried Mme. d’Arcy, thinking only of her son, “why did you not mention it at the time? Why did you conceal it, so that now your word does not suffice to save my child?”

“Why? Oh, why?” repeated Alice. “Who knows but all this mystery conceals a secret sentiment? In the neighborhood—I have been told—it was expected

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that Myron would marry Edloe—that is when she was younger.”

“I have not deserved your cruel words, Alice, and I will not suffer them,” cried Edloe, indignantly, as she arose, pale and trembling, unable to conceal all that she suffered.

“I beg your pardon, Edloe,” stammered Alice, somewhat abashed, “but if you knew how unhappy I am.”

“Poor child,” said Edloe, kissing her sister affectionately, “I suffer as much for you as I do for my own agony.”

After this explosion of unjust recriminations there was a profound silence, then they tried to speak of something else, but did not succeed. Finally Mme. d’Arcy looked up and said:

“I shall leave for home this afternoon, where my presence is necessary. As the solitude frightens me, I would be pleased to have Alice accompany me. She can take possession of the apartments set aside for her, where she will be in her own little kingdom, in her husband’s home. And I shall see, my dear child,” she added, with a faint smile, “that you are never called ‘Mademoiselle.’ Edloe will not remain alone, since for many years her aunt has acted as mother to her; and besides, she is so kind, so generous, that she will not refuse to lend me her little sister.”

This solution brought relief. Alice, like a spoiled, wilful child, after her paroxysm of anger was over, forgot its violence, and tried to make others forget it also by being caressing and affectionate. But she was, nevertheless, delighted at the proposed change.

When the sound of the carriage wheels had died away in the distance, Edloe seated herself on a stool, and laid her weary head on her aunt’s lap, as she

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had often done when a child. The silence of the large drawing-room seemed so restful, and the gentle caresses of Mme. Vaudery's plump hand comforted her. She could now speak or be silent, as she wished; she was no longer constrained to exertion.

"My poor little Edloe," murmured Aunt Louise, very softly, "and I did not understand. You loved him, and you gave him to your sister."

Edloe had not the strength to protest—and she did not say so. She wanted to weep, but she had no more tears.

The motherly caresses, the whispered words of affection, calmed and soothed her. Suddenly, as if in spite of herself, Aunt Louise cried out:

"Did I not tell you that misfortune would enter this house with that girl?"

CHAPTER XIV.

HER DUTY.

The day fixed for the trial was approaching, and the murderer was still undiscovered. Mme. d'Arcy and Alice had been admitted to see the prisoner and returned from their visit somewhat reassured and hopeful. Myron seemed so sure of the result, spoke so definitely of their trip to Italy, fixing the date immediately after the trial, that he inspired confidence in them both. He had a long interview with his lawyer, a man selected for his convincing eloquence, whom the Marquis had recommended. The lawyer had no doubt of an acquittal.

In the meantime Myron worked ardently on his historical work. He had completed the first chapter, a chapter of general observations which had required long and minute researches.

The weather had become abominable, and visits between the chateau and its neighbors were rare, the intercourse between them being almost restricted to short notes which brought snatches of news to the two secluded women. There was a visible straint between the two sisters when they met. The long, intimate chats, which had been such a source of pleasure to both, were no longer possible. They nevertheless still appeared very affectionate toward each other, and Alice exerted her old coquetry to regain her lost grounds, for she could not exist without the love of those who surrounded her. She had now recovered

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her gaiety and high spirits; there was such a craving of life and joy in her nature, that sadness and despair could not long survive. Gaiety after all is more a matter of temperament than of circumstances. The first time Edloe heard the merry laugh she shuddered, it seemed to her that the echo resounded within the prison walls over there.

Mme. Vaudery had entirely resumed her former antipathy. "Humph," she would often mutter, "she was very sweet as long as she could take advantage of the affection she knew well how to inspire. But now she has no further need of it. She has robbed us of the Husband she desired, and we are almost forgotten. Of course she wants to keep a loop-hole for herself, for, as neighbors and relatives, we may, after all, be of some use. It would not be good policy to quarrel; but as for intimacy, real friendship, ah! as to that, it is passed forever. And to think that Edloe suffers from her neglect, that she loves her—with that exaggerated love she bestowed on even her most disgraceful looking dolls in her childhood. If the sacrifice were to be gone over again, she would not shrink from it; if a still more painful sacrifice were imposed on her she would accept it."

Aunt Louise little suspected how true a prophet she was. She never again referred to the secret she had guessed, and Edloe gave her no encouragement to speak of it, as the least allusion to it caused her atrocious suffering.

In spite of all, Edloe still hoped. The assassin would surely be discovered in time, and her painful sacrifice rendered unnecessary. Many promising clues were followed, but all ended in disappointment. Everybody, even those who had been most hostile to Myron, began to believe in this mysterious criminal, and hoped that chance might lead to his discov-

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ery. A criminal who escapes detention usually becomes bolder and does not stop at his first attempt; a second crime often leads to the discovery of the first.

Thanks to her friend, the old Marquis, Edloe was kept fully informed of the divers phases and steps undertaken in the case. At each new clew she felt assured of success, and at each new deception she sank back heavily into her grief. Her health began to suffer seriously from these terrible agitations and her poor, pale features presented a vivid contrast with the fresh, rosy face of Alice, who, after the first shock, had quickly regained her appetite, and was very busy making plans for the promised trip to Italy.

At last the day preceding the trial dawned. No new discovery had been made, and again fickle public opinion had turned hostile to the accused, the bearer of an aristocratic name.

A sensation. A sensational Parisian newspaper, celebrated for its violence against all accused persons, published a very remarkable résumé of the Stamer-d'Arcy affair, which was a veritable and overwhelming condemnation. The prejudiced writer gave a host of details concerning the youth of the two former friends, their quarrels at college, and the antipathy of their natures; he dwelt at length on the rivalry of the two men who loved the same woman, a rivalry which, from the very first day, had assumed an extraordinarily violent and passionate character. There was also a vague allusion to the Captain's well-known skill as a duellist and to Myron d'Arcy's studious and sedentary life, which made him incontestably inferior to his adversary in the manipulation of arms.

All this was so forcibly told that the jury called upon to pass judgment on the accused could have no

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doubt that Myron d'Arcy was the murderer; that if anyone asserted his innocence, it was only because influenced by his great name and fortune.

This article threw Edloe into a state of the wildest consternation and affright.

Early the next morning she was to leave for the city where she had been summoned as a witness. The mother and the young wife of the accused had been spared this torture; furthermore, they had nothing to tell that was not already known.

The day was bitterly cold, but Edloe was determined to see her adviser, the Marquis, whom she found at home, detained at the house by an attack of gout.

"I know all, my child, I have read the article," he said, sympathizingly, as she entered.

"What is to be done?" she asked sadly.

"There is nothing to be done. M. Stamer is moving heaven and earth to obtain what he calls justice; he had many friends among the newspaper men. It seems that Myron was foolish enough to treat him haughtily at the time of the inquest, and now this man thinks it his sacred duty to leave no stone unturned to obtain your brother-in-law's condemnation. He is a powerful adversary and we have relied too much on the insufficiency of the proof against Myron. The change in public opinion in our favor in this vicinity reassured us; we supposed this relenting was general, but we were mistaken. However, I have the greatest confidence in our lawyer, and I am sure that his speech will be a masterpiece."

"And nothing has been discovered?"

"Absolutely nothing. You still cling to that hope, my dear Edloe; but, as you see, we are now on the eve of the trial, and we have achieved nothing in that direction."

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"But we have seen instances where the guilty person gave himself up at the last moment to save an innocent man."

"Yes, in Victor Hugo's works, but not in real life. Do you believe that a miserable wretch who would conceal himself in the forest and shoot his victim from behind would be capable of such heroic abnegation? But I am not alarmed. An accusation resting on such weak proofs can be easily overthrown. Cheer up, my dear Edloe. Go home and rest quietly, for to-morrow will be a terrible day for you."

"Terrible, indeed," murmured the poor girl.

"And I will not be able to accompany you, for this accursed gout keeps me a prisoner."

Edloe did not reply; she was glad to go alone, and had resisted her aunt's pleadings to accompany her.

"Whether he be acquitted or not, he will remain under the odium of this monstrous accusation," she said with a sigh.

"Oh, as to that," said the Marquis, carelessly, "Myron will travel for a time and with us such things are soon forgotten."

"You have been very kind to me, and I shall never forget it," said Edloe, as she arose wearily to go.

The old man took her hand in his and pressed it affectionately.

"Courage, Edloe, courage," he said. "You will at least be spared the curiosity of the other witnesses. You have inspired great respect and compassion, and I have succeeded in obtaining permission for you to await your turn in the little ante-chamber next to the court room."

Edloe thanked him mechanically. She was indifferent to all this. In the obsession of her fixed idea, all trifling troubles and vexations were forgotten.

As she came out, the cold, chilly wind made her

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shiver and she regretted having come, for what would happen if she were to be ill?

Notwithstanding her moral and physical suffering, she was struck by the beauty of the country at that moment. The winer sun was suddenly emerged from the clouds and was casting its dazzling rays through the frosty branches of the trees. It was an enchanting sight. The village was enveloped in death-like stillness; not a sound disturbed the icy silence. And above the sadness of the frozen earth, the sun in its sudden brightness spoke of joy and hope.

The door of the church stood open, and Edloe entered to rest, fearing her strength would give away before she reached home.

The profound peace and silence of the frozen country seemed even more profound in this somber little chapel, wherein the small sanctuary lamp glistened like a star. Edloe knelt down and tried to pray, but the words would not come.

The horror of the sacrifice, now become indispensable, appeared to her so clearly that she was overwhelmed, and the numbness of death came over her.

She realized that, until now, she had never really believed that this sacrifice was true. She had clung to the hope that something would happen—she knew not what—but that something would happen in time to save her; that her unhappy love, the plaintive cries of her heart, would not be unveiled to the world; that her conduct, her sacrifice, her affection for her sister, would not be commented on, criticized, and above all, revealed to Myron.

More than once she had feverishly arisen in the night, determined to burn the diary. That destroyed, she could only be silent. No one suspected its existence. She would swear to the truth, that she had

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given rendezvous to Myron in the park, and that they were there at the time of the murder. Even if her words were doubted, her evidence would have some weight. She was fully aware that she would compromise her reputation by her testimony. People would ask, as Alice had done, "Why all this mystery? There is something beneath."

Yet she had not burned the book; it still existed. She would make use of it. But the struggle with herself was terrible.

She had forgotten where she was, why she had entered, giving herself up entirely to the struggle waging within her.

A hand touched her lightly on the shoulder. It was the curé who had stood observing her from a distance.

"You seem very unhappy, my poor Edloe," he said gently.

"Yes, Monsieur, very unhappy."

As he raised her face, he was struck by its haggard expression.

"Confide in me," he said, kindly, "it will bring you relief. It is not only anxiety that tortures you. There is something else, I am sure of it; and it is the sweetest privilege of my holy calling to console the afflicted."

"You can do nothing for me," said the girl, shaking her head sadly, "I cannot speak. I have a duty to accomplish, and I ask myself if I shall accomplish it."

Whatever it may be, you will do your duty to the end, for I know you," he replied, gravely.

"I do not know if you know me. I am not sure that I know myself. I feel capable of wicked, and what is worse, of cowardly things."

"I have no fear for you, my child. It is not as a

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priest that I speak to you, but as an old friend. There comes a moment to all, to the old man full of weakness like me, to the beautiful young girl, pure and beautiful as you are, when we find ourselves called upon to perform some heroic action; whether that heroism is concealed in our hearts, or it bursts forth before the eyes of all, heroism is always heroism. When we feel ourselves weaken, there is always help at hand. Do not doubt it, Edloe, for I have never doubted it."

She made no reply, and he walked softly away. When she again raised her head, she saw him kneeling with his white head bowed down, motionless, under the flickering light of the lamp.

He was but a simple country priest, a kind-hearted old man, who only asked to go on his way in peace with himself and his neighbor. But his soul was strong in faith, and he was praying fervently for her.

Then it seemed to her that all that had amassed of rebellion, harshness, bitterness, within her was melting away, that a weight had been lifted from her heart. She suffered less; a sort of peace had come to her in the midst of her anguish. She wept softly; she who had been unable to weep for so long.

When she arose, she trembled no longer. She went out into the bitter cold of the wintry afternoon, fortified, almost serene. The bright sun was disappearing in the horizon; and it seemed to her that its last rays were for her, that they penetrated into her heart and filled it with courage.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIAL AND THE RESULT.

This little town was almost proud of the celebrated trial that was to take place in its court-rooms. Strangers often came to visit the old churches and the Abbey during the bathing season, but the greater part of the year the town slept as peacefully as a provincial village.

For the last two months, the murder had been the sole topic of conversation. Young girls, and young women especially, felt a great interest in the poor little bride, so cruelly stricken in the height of her happiness, at the moment she was leaving for her wedding trip. It was known that Myron was working as calmly in his cell as if he were in his own study. In this, some saw the security of innocence, while others pronounced it the cynicism of a man assured beforehand that he was not one of those whom a jury condemn.

The court-room was filled to overflowing; society rushed in with as much zeal as if to witness the representation of a sensational drama. The magistrates, the lawyers in their gowns, the twelve jurymen, the whole imposing paraphernalia of justice failed to impress the gay assemblage.

Myron d'Arcy was calm, but very pale; he was much emaciated, and dark rings encircled his eyes. He answered all questions addressed to him in a clear, firm voice; but the interrogatory brought out

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nothing new. He merely repeated what he had said the day following the crime, nothing more. When the president, however, asked him how he had spent the afternoon of June 27th, there was a shade of hesitation in his reply, which did not escape any one.

"I was feeling ill and went out for a walk," he said.

"In what direction did you go?"

"In the direction of the Côte-Boisee."

"And no one saw you go out?"

"I believe not, Monsieur. The plan of the villa is well known, since it was examined on the day of my arrest. The window in my study is so low that I usually jump through it into the garden, rather than go through the house to reach the door. Neither the servants nor the gardener are in the habit of wandering on that side of the house, which is but a slope, shaded by a few trees. It is but a few minutes' walk from the forest."

"Your supposition, then, is that the criminal entered your study through this window, and stole your revolver?"

"It seems probable."

"And for nearly two months you never thought of opening the case in which you kept that weapon?"

"I did not think of it, Monsieur. My mother placed this revolver within my reach, but I believed it a useless precaution, for the neighborhood is very peaceable."

"On the day of the crime you were expected at a garden party?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Yet, although Mlle. LaFaucher, with whom you were already in love, was there, you did not go. Why not?"

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"As I have already told you, I was not feeling well and wanted solitude."

The examination continued, and the accused replied with the same calmness that had marked his first answers.

Public opinion began to waver. The women were in favor of the handsome young man who looked so gentle and intelligent, but the men, especially those who claimed great pretensions to equality, reproached him his title, his quiet and distinguished manners. He evidently placed little value on proofs that would have overwhelmed a poor devil!

When questioned on his relations with the victim, Myron answered firmly and without a moment of hesitation.

"Harold Stamer and myself were closely linked, as often happens, through the hazzard of being classmates, and through the emulation for places, in which we contested with each other. There was between us no real sympathy, but there, nevertheless, existed in our relations a certain attraction, which often comes from certain dissimilarities. We loved to discuss, sure beforehand that one of us would instinctively take the opposite side of the question. But those discussions rarely went to the end, for Stamer could not bear contradiction, and I detested quarrels. He was, nevertheless, always the first to come back to me."

"It would then seem that the captain was more attracted by you than you by him?"

"It is possible. But from the moment we became rivals, this attraction turned to hatred in him."

"This hatred, it is said, existed on both sides."

"I judged him severely, perhaps, but my antipathy did not go so far as hatred."

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"Yet you were trying to find an occasion to challenge him."

"We found ourselves in a situation to which there was no other issue. Only I wanted to find another pretext, not wishing to mix in this quarrel the name of the young girl who has since become my wife."

"The captain was known to be a formidable duellist."

"I know it, Monsieur, and it has been insinuated that fear drove me to murder; in a word, I am accused of cowardice. I appeal to all men of honor, to all men of my education, is such a thing possible?"

There was in his voice such an accent of truth, so much vibrating indignation that a murmur of approbation floated through the audience. It was quickly repressed, however, and the president reminded the accused that he was there to reply to the questions addressed to him, and not to plead his cause.

The witnesses were then called.

M. Stamer, brother of the victim, was the first to give his testimony. Although it was known that he could throw no light on the matter, he, nevertheless, excited a deep curiosity. He was a man of about forty, of sallow complexion, and with sharp, restless eyes. It was evident that to him the guilt of Myron d'Arcy admitted of no doubt. When reminded that the captain and himself had never shown much fraternal affection, he protested that they were of the same blood; that this blood now cried for vengeance; that he would never rest until justice was done! He then related his arrival on the scene of the crime.

"It was Myron d'Arcy," he went on, "who sent me the dispatch; he alone knew my address. During his school days he often came to spend a holiday at my home with my brother. When I saw him, therefore, I went to him with outstretched hand; but

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he pretended not to see it, and merely bowed, as if to a stranger. He seemed much preoccupied, very gloomy and exceedingly bored by the questions asked him. This uneasiness struck me. I had been told that Myron d'Arcy and my brother were in love with the same young girl, and that the chances were in Harold's favor. Notwithstanding a certain roughness, my brother was always successful with women; he knew well how to soften his voice and his glance when he was in love, and the contrast between this sudden gentleness and his habitual bluntness was very seductive. When Myron d'Arcy refused me his hand, it gave me the impression that he was not a stranger to my unfortunate brother's death."

"Why did you not mention your suspicions at the time?" interrupted the president.

"How could I, Monsieur? M. d'Arcy was known and esteemed through the whole country, and seemed to hold an unassailable position. Beside, what proof could I give against him? None. But the more I reflected over this sad affair, the more convinced I became that my first impression was right. Harold was a stranger in the vicinity and could have no enemies; if he had a few discussions, it is not admissible that these light quarrels would excite an implacable hatred. On the other hand, it is well known that Myron d'Arcy was passionately in love; it was the love of a man of study, of a man who has really had no youth, a sudden explosion with a violence that bordered on madness. As soon as he was rid of his redoubtable rival, his somber humor disappeared. His joy could not be concealed; he was so triumphant that the contrast with his former gloom struck everybody. When the news of his arrest reached me, it seemed to me that I had expected it since the day when I saw him standing beside my brother's body."

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The servant was the next to testify. He was an ill-favored man, with a low brow, thick lips, and seemed very proud of the importance given him by this affair. At first he chose his phrases very carefully, but relaxed somewhat as he went on, feeling sure that this brilliant assemblage was listening attentively.

"You pretend to have overheard a violent quarrel between the accused and the victim?" asked the president.

"Yes, Monsieur. I went with my companions to get the remains of the breakfast, but was alone at that moment. As I could not hear plainly, I went nearer," replied the witness.

"You have, no doubt, a habit of listening at keyholes?"

"Oh, no; for I might be caught. But I admit that I am inquisitive, and was anxious to be well informed."

"What interest could this altercation have for you?"

"Well, you see, Monsieur, we have few distractions in the country, and the affairs at Côté-Boise were often discussed in the kitchen. Each had his candidate; mine was the captain. First, because Mlle. LaFaucher encouraged him, then——"

"Then—go on."

"Then, Monsieur, people say that M. Myron d'Arcy should have married the elder, and not the younger sister. In fact, I was much amused by the affair, and was anxious to know what was going on. I did not reach the spot until the end of the quarrel, but I swear that I heard threats."

"From M. d'Arcy?"

"Both were much excited; they were talking at the same time and not listening to each other. Final-

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ly the captain hurried away, and I had scarcely time to conceal myself behind a tree——”

“It was owing to your gossip after the crime that you were dismissed from service? Without proof whatever, you accused M. d’Arcy of being the murderer?”

“I was sure of it. As to my dismissal, the lady was a foreigner, and I was tired of waiting on a table where I could not understand a word that was said. I was on the point of leaving when she gave me notice. Before another week, the whole country was as sure as myself that the baron had done the deed.”

“It was to you that the peasant remitted the revolver when found?”

“Yes, Monsieur. I paid ten francs for it, but I do not regret my money, for in cleaning it I found the initials M. N. A., and I immediately brought the revolver to the authorities. My plan was to have him arrested before the ceremony. But there was some delay. Besides, M. le Comte, who knew the high standing of the two families, wanted to avoid scandal as much as possible. He went to the chateau himself, and I am told was mistaken for a guest.”

After this testimony, the interest flagged. A few neighbors and friends who had known Myron in his childhood were called, but their testimony was of no importance.

There was a ripple of excitement, followed by a deathlike stillness when the president said:

“Call Mlle. LaFaucher.”

Fatigue was forgotten, and all eyes and ears were strained to see and hear the most important deposition of the day.

When she reached the court house, in the midst of a surging throng, Edloe appreciated the kindness of

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her old friend, the Marquis, in obtaining permission to await her turn in a private room. In her nervous state it would have been exceedingly painful to feel herself an object of curiosity or compassion. She had slept but little the previous night, and was almost glad that the moment had come when she could rid herself of the nightmare that haunted her—like the wounded man who is anxiously awaiting the coming of the surgeon, and repeats to himself once the operation is over he will be left in peace.

Yet in spite of all, she still believed in that long-expected miracle; convinced that at the last moment the real culprit would cry out: "That man is innocent!" How often her imagination had evoked the scene—then she saw Myron free, proud and happy, and herself once more shut up in her solitude burying her secret with herself. And all would be well. Myron would never know that she had loved him with passion. Alice would never suspect at what price her happiness had been bought. The modesty of her soul, that sacred modesty, would be respected. The horrible sacrifice would be unnecessary.

And in the solitude of the little room in which she found herself, she held her breath in expectation. Sometimes a confused murmur would reach her from the court-room. She knew that if the scene evoked in her poor, tired brain was produced, this murmur would be transformed in acclamations, that nothing could prevent the burst of joy and applause. Then she would understand.

But time passed on, and this absurd hope became weaker and weaker, and finally vanished. Her agony now increased; she asked herself if her strength would carry her to the end. It must, since she alone could now save Myron. He would be saved! He would emerge from this place, where he was now

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seated like a vulgar criminal, with head erect. In the midst of her anguish, Edloe felt a sentiment of divine joy in thinking that it was from her hand, that hand he would not take, that he would receive freedom, the happiness of his whole life.

When the usher came to her, she was already standing, ready to go.

Nevertheless, as she caught a confused glimpse of the judges and the excited throng, she instinctively shrank back for a moment. It was no doubt thus, that Christian virgins, in the days of persecution, faltered for a moment when they found themselves suddenly in the arena, the center of attraction for thousands of spectators who had come to see them tortured. Then Edloe turned to Myron. As she saw him, so altered, pale and emaciated, she was invaded by a compassion that almost transfigured her. He had suffered greatly, and she would put an end to his sufferings.

She mechanically answered the preliminary questions, but as she went on, she detected deep respect and compassion in the voice of the president. This gave her courage, and her answers came more distinctly and firmly.

"Rest assured, Mademoiselle, that this trial to which we are forced to submit you, will not be of long duration," said the president, kindly.

"I am at your orders, Monsieur," she replied.

One of Edloe's greatest charms was her voice; it was singularly pure and sweet. Even when speaking low it was distinctively heard. It was also felt that each word she uttered must be true and sincere. Besides, her extreme pallor, her evident suffering, excited the sympathy of all. She replied very simply, without a gesture, her hands clasped together in her muff, her eyes fixed on the president.

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"You have known the accused for many years, I believe?"

"Since we were children together. His mother and my mother were intimate friends."

"Was he violent and passionate in his childhood?"

"Not at all, Monsieur. The child promised what the grave and studious man has become."

"You never heard him speak of his comrade, Harold Stamer?"

"Never. Myron was at college, and we met less frequently as he grew older. I saw Captain Stamer on the day I met my sister at the station. I heard his name for the first time when M. d'Arcy introduced him."

"He was very soon admitted into the intimacy of your family?"

"He was constantly with Myron, Monsieur, and as Myron was almost considered as a relative, the captain's visits were quite frequent. Moreover, we were receiving a great deal of company at the time, as I desired to make my sister's stay in the country as agreeable as possible."

"Did you not soon perceive that the captain was in love with your sister, and that M. d'Arcy was jealous?"

Edloe hesitated a moment, then replied firmly: "As soon as I understood that M. Stamer was interested in my sister I tried to warn her against him. I did not believe he could make her happy."

"And from that moment you thought of marrying her to your neighbor?"

"No, Monsieur," she said, after another moment of hesitation, "I did not think of it at the time. It was only later, when I understood that they loved each other, that this marriage was decided."

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I am forced to ques-

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tion you on your private sentiments, but I am absolutely forced to it. At the time of the arrest, you tried to save the accused by declaring that you were conversing with him in the park at the time of the crime. Your sister's words destroyed this testimony. According to her, you were too ill to go out. On her return she found you exactly as she had left you, a prey to such pain that you could scarcely lift your head."

Here the attention of the audience became such that even the slight murmur of the throng ceased.

In the absolute silence, Edloe's sweet voice rang out, clear and distinct:

"Monsieur, I have never told a falsehood. I would not lie, even to save my brother-in-law."

"Your brother-in-law, it is possible. Pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I allude to a very delicate subject. But in your neighborhood you were believed to be betrothed to the Baron d'Arcy."

"It was a mistake, Monsieur, we were never betrothed."

"Although there may have been no engagement between you, a sentiment more tender than friendship might have led you to utter a heroic falsehood. A woman who loves will sacrifice everything, even her reputation, to save the man she loves."

"I have told no falsehood, Monsieur. When, in spite of serious family reasons I consented to receive Alice as my sister, I took solemn engagements with myself in regard to her. She is six years younger than I, and I considered her somewhat in the light of a child. I believed I was doing my duty on that day in thinking of her future."

"It was about that time, then, that you understood what others had long been aware of—that is, that M.

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d'Arcy was in love with your sister and desired to marry her?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"In that case, would it not have been more simple to have had a frank explanation with Mme. d'Arcy? Did you not fear to compromise your reputation by giving a rendezvous to a young man who was supposed to be your fiancé?"

Edloe's face turned a trifle paler. After a silence that seemed an eternity, she replied, with a great effort:

"I had grave and personal reasons to act as I did. You must realize, Monsieur, that in declaring that I gave a secret rendezvous, knowing the interpretation that might be placed on this meeting, I am not doing an indifferent thing—that I suffer. It seems to me I might well be believed."

For the first time her calmness was visibly troubled; there was a tremor in her voice, like a suppressed cry of torture and anguish. A sympathizing murmur arose from the crowd.

"Do you not see, Mademoiselle, that this half avowal gives a terrible likelihood to the hypothesis mentioned a few moments ago? To many women, a falsehood under such circumstances is not only excusable but heroic."

"And yet," cried the girl, "I have not lied!"

"Admit that you are telling the truth. What time did you go into the park?"

"I had given a rendezvous to Myron for half past three, but, although I went down a little before three, I found him already there when I reached the cross."

"All these details seem well fixed in your memory?"

"They are indeed!"

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"No one saw you going out or coming in?"

"No one."

"It is a pity, Mademoiselle, a great pity. I need not tell you how respected and honored you are personally by all who know you, and I assure you that your testimony will have weight with the jury. But if you had the least proof, however slight, to support our words——"

"Then," cried Edloe, in a vibrating voice, "then, the accusation would prove groundless?"

"Evidently. But that proof?"

"That proof exists, Monsieur!"

A stifled exclamation arose from every throat. And above this murmur, Edloe heard a woman's sob. Her strength almost deserted her, she recognized Alice in that weeping woman. She was evidently there with her mother-in-law, lost in the throng, anxiously watching the testimony that would decide Myron's fate. The chalice was full; she must drink it to the dregs!

Order was re-established, and the president once more turned to Edloe.

"What proof have you, Mademoiselle?"

It was only after several unsuccessful efforts that she succeeded in answering. At last, in a monotonous and weary voice, as if she were repeating a lesson learned by heart, she said, painfully:

"I understand, Monsieur, that you admit, as proofs, the account books of merchants, well kept registers, and even household accounts."

"It is true."

"The proof that I bring is my diary; that is, the register of my hidden thoughts, of my most secret sentiments. In it you will find the incidents of that day very minutely described. After reading it no one can doubt my veracity."

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Instinctively she turned her head. Myron's ardent gaze acted as magnetism. There was nothing to conceal now. Even before the reading of these sheets, Myron understood the extent of the sacrifice, knew that he had been loved, adored by this poor, misunderstood young girl. He saw all this on her agonized face. And in that long gaze, she read the depths of his soul and realized that he knew, that he bowed down before her in spirit, that he blessed her; she saw that it was her in this supreme moment that he thought of and not Alice, although her sobs had revealed her presence there, but of her, of her only. That instant repaid her for all.

Yet, when the president asked for the diary, she retained it for a moment longer, loath to part with it.

"May I ask, Monsieur, that only the parts absolutely necessary shall be read? I suffer much——"

She could not finish her phrase, but all had understood.

"I give you my word, Mademoiselle. But to prove to the gentlemen of the jury that this is not a manuscript fabricated for the occasion, I shall have to read a few passages taken at random during the months that preceded the day of the crime. Moreover," he added as he turned the pages, "the color of the ink, paler in many places, is a conclusive proof that this journal was written at different times. I see that it dates back to nearly three years ago."

During the reading she remained motionless, almost as white as a marble statue. It seemed to her that life was dying out within her, that each instant left her colder, that the blood was freezing in her veins. She listened to the expressionless voice of the clerk as he read aloud that all might hear the despairing avowals, the cries of passion, she had writ-

CHAPTER XVI.

HER REWARD.

Edloe LaFaucher was very ill, but she did not die. Her aunt nursed her day and night, suffering no one to approach the bedside where her niece, a prey to an ardent fever, talked wildly; her brain ever busy, her eyes haggard and frightened, as if pursued by a nameless terror.

Myron and his young wife no longer thought of the proposed journey. They came every day to the chateau, where they saw no one but the servants. At last, one morning they were told that the danger was over, that the delirium had ceased. As they refused to leave without seeing Mme. Vaudery, she appeared, very cold and distant, scarcely deigning to answer their questions.

"It is true the doctor has hopes," she said. "The delirium has ceased. Do you know what she repeats incessantly: 'Oh, aunt, why did you save me? I long so much for death; I am so weary; I have spent all my strength!' I believe I preferred her delirium to this cry."

"If you knew, Aunt Louise, how much I have wept," murmured Alice.

"You can do that without effort," said Mme. Vaudery, dryly.

"I know you will never forgive me. All that has happened is not my fault, and yet without me it would not have been."

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ten for herself only. Sometimes, the sense did not penetrate into her tired brain; then, again, it seemed to her that the words re-echoed within her with piercing accents."

"My little Alice, if you knew, if you could guess the thought that struggles within me! Are you really what you seem? But what matters since you possess that all-powerful charm; since, though doubting and questioning, still I love you; since to spare you a tear, I would weep day and night; since to give you happiness, I would accept perpetual sadness and despair."

And then again:

"My God! My God! How I suffer! How unhappy I am! How I wish I could die! He called me sister. Was it simply a commonplace word of affection, or was it said with a particular intention? Am I not destined to become his sister some day? Alas! —"

And now her secret belonged to the world; it would be tossed about amidst peals of laughter as children toss a toy balloon filled with air. She could never appear before the world without the remembrance of this cruel day standing as a wall between herself and those who gazed at her. And that was nothing, Myron knew that he had been loved. Alice knew it also. And nothing, nothing could make them forget this sad love!

Yet, in spite of all, in spite of her personal sufferings, her sacrifice brought her infinite sweetness. Myron was saved, and saved by her.

When the reading was at last terminated, a feeling of numbness came over her, and without a cry she fell heavily to the floor.

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Aunt Louise remained inflexible and silent. Myron instinctively threw his arm around Alice and said:

"I am sure that Edloe is less harsh to this child than you."

"In fact, Myron, she never once mentioned you in her delirium. It was Alice she called incessantly, as if in the crisis she had gone through, all had foundered, except that instinct of maternity, that need of loving which has cost her so much."

Before she could be prevented, Alice escaped from the room, ran wildly up the stairs, and entered the sick chamber from which she had so long been excluded. When Mme. Vaudery reached it in her turn, followed by Myron, Alice was kneeling beside the bed, and Edloe, radiant and with eyes sparkling with happiness, was caressing her with her weak, trembling hand.

"I understand it all now," stammered the younger sister, "and will try all my life to remember that there is something above happiness. Tell me that you forgive, tell me what I can do to merit this forgiveness some day."

"But I have nothing to forgive you, my little Alice. I have loved you, that is all. Some day, if you have many children, you will give me one—a blonde little girl. I will bring her up and love her so much. There is within me a sentiment of maternal love."

The young couple finally left for Italy, where their stay was indefinitely prolonged, because Alice was failing in health, and her husband was staying to see if she could regain her health. On the advice of the physician, Edloe also left her dear solitude and went with her aunt to Algeria. She felt the need of leav-

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ing the spot, for some time at least, where she had suffered so much.

She recovered her physical strength long before the wounds in her heart closed, but the cure came at last. Edloe acquired a taste for traveling, and her aunt, who was fond of a change, encouraged her. More than a year passed thus, and Edloe recovered her former serenity and was almost contented.

A few months after Myron's acquittal, Captain Stamer's murderer was discovered. He was a poor soldier who had deserted, exasperated by the harshness of his captain. While almost dying of starvation, he had entered a house with the intention of robbery, and finding a revolver, the idea immediately came to him to kill the man who was the cause of his troubles. Later, being arrested for desertion and burglary, he related how he had avenged himself on his commander.

When Edloe finally returned to the chateau the Spring was in its full splendor, but it was a sad homecoming, for Alice was dead. She died with the love of all.

Myron's only thought now was to raise his son, to bring him up as his mother would have, if she had been living.

The chateau is now like it was two years before; the young chatelaine is accompanying Mme. d'Arcy to the end of the park. Again as they walk on, their gaze wanders over the sea, the graceful curve of the yellow shore, the thin silhouette of the distant harbor. They seem equally happy to see each other. Mme. d'Arcy, not daring to express all her thoughts, displayed infinite tenderness in her least words, in her least gestures, and Edloe understood it all.

Edloe was her old self again. Preparations were

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being made for a wedding that would soon take place; again uniting two of the most prominent families in that section of the country.

Mme. d'Arcy was as happy as the rest, for the desire of her life would now be fulfilled, that Edloe would soon be her daughter.

Mme. Vaudery is very glad that Edloe would now be happy. It had been decided that they should all live together on Myron's place and that Edloe should rent the chateau to our American friends.

Little Myron junior was now three years old. He was the picture of his mother, with his light hair, and by this he often caused the things of the past to be thought of by all who had loved her and he was often told of his mother.

Let us now leave Edloe in peace. Her sacrifice was not fruitless, for she has now received her reward. She yearns for death no longer, as she had done during that horrible crisis. She loved life, notwithstanding the shade of sadness which she could not completely throw off and which had nothing of bitterness, and she found it good to live, for she was now loved by a devoted husband and three children, one of which they all thought a great deal of was a little girl named Alice.

Happiness having thus come, she regretted nothing.

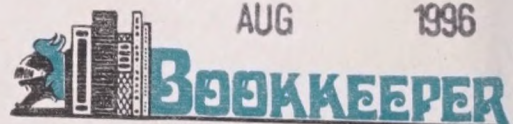
[THE END.]

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Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:

AUG

1996



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